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SUPER-SALOON SHOWDOWN

NEW BMW M5 vs PORSCHE

A new king is crowned - and it's not from Munich

+ SCOOP: NEW iX5

FORD'S WILD OFF-ROAD MUSTANG

NEW V6 AUDI: IT'S FINALLY FUN

REVEALED

ASTON'S NEW DROP-TOP

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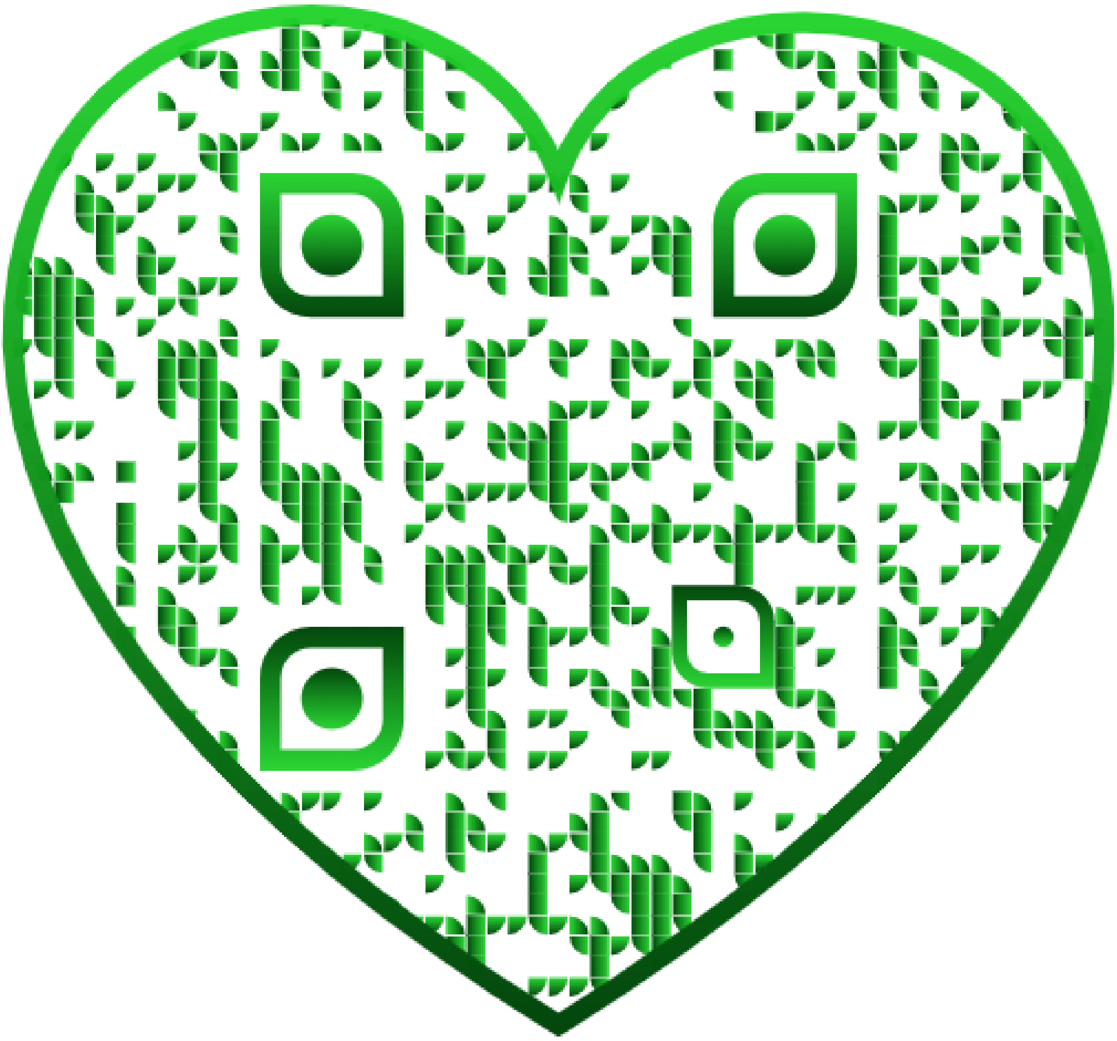

Win 2,000 to 10,000 miles[1] of free charging

with the new Škoda Elroq

Fancy getting up to 10,000 miles of free public charging[1] when you buy your next all-electric SUV? Well, Škoda's Million Mile Giveaway is the answer, offering a range of prizes to the first 475 customers who pre-order the new all-electric Škoda Elroq.

There are plenty of compelling reasons why the new Škoda Elroq should top your EV shortlist. Blending compact city-friendly SUV style with bags of interior space, it's packed with smart connected in-car tech, while offering up to 360 miles of range[2] and rapid charging that lets you top up from 10% to 80% in under 30 minutes with an ultra-rapid 145kW to 175kW DC charger.[3] All-in, it's the perfect all-electric all-rounder.

As if that wasn't enough incentive, Škoda's Million Mile Giveaway is offering from 2,000 to 10,000 free miles of public charging[1] to the first 475 customers who place an order for the new Škoda Elroq. Simply place your order, click on the link when you get the Million Mile Giveaway email, and spin-to-win to see how many miles of free public charging[1] you've won. Once you collect your new Škoda Elroq, Škoda will send you a voucher code to credit the miles to your Škoda Powerpass account.

So, whether you end up winning 2,000 miles, 4,000 miles or an astonishing 10,000 miles of free public charging[1], your journey with the Škoda Elroq gets off to an even easier – and an even more enjoyable – start.

MILLION MILE
ŠKODA
GIVEAWAY

SKODA
Elroq

Scan the QR code to learn more or visit
www.skoda.co.uk/finance/deals/elroq-million-mile-giveaway

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[1] UK residents, 18+. Opens [18.10.2024]. 5 x £2,500, 5 x £1,000, 465 x £500 voucher rewards available. First come, first served. Retail customers only. One claim per qualifying customer purchase. Maximum two claims per customer address. Promotion link to "spin the wheel" mechanic will be made available by email to first 475 purchasers of Škoda Elroq through an authorised Škoda agent in the UK. Entry is completed once customer has "spun the wheel" and entered all requested details in online form. Entry forfeited without reward if entry is not completed before 23:59 on 14 April 2025. Vouchers issued following vehicle handover, forfeited if not used within three years. Internet access, MyŠkoda account, and Škoda PowerPass card required.£2,500, £1,000, £500 vouchers calculated as an estimate of up to 10,000, 4,000, 2,000 miles respectively. Based on current Škoda 'PowerPass Charge Free' tariff and average VW Group model range efficiency of 3.3 miles/kWh. Tariff subject to change before voucher expiry: this may result in you getting fewer miles than 10,000/4,000/2,000 depending on when you use your voucher. The efficiency figure is based on standardised test data after the battery had been fully charged (to 100%) and may not reflect real world driving. Actual efficiency differs depending on multiple variables, including your selected vehicle and configuration, accessories fitted (post-registration), variations in weather, driving styles, route conditions, speed, vehicle age, battery age and temperature and vehicle load. The actual number of free miles you receive may be less than the maximum stated free miles (i.e. 10,000, 4,000 or 2,000) and will depend on the actual efficiency of your selected vehicle in the real world and actual charging costs at the time you charge the vehicle. [2] Official test (WLTP) electric range for Škoda Elroq is 232-360 miles depending on trim. Test data obtained under standardised conditions after the battery had been fully charged (to 100%). The Škoda Elroq is a battery electric vehicle requiring mains electricity for charging. Figures shown are for comparability purposes. Only compare electric range figures with other vehicles tested to the same technical procedures. These figures may not reflect real life driving results, which will depend on a number of factors including the starting charge of the battery, accessories fitted (post-registration), variations in weather, driving styles, route conditions, speed, vehicle and battery age and vehicle load. Data correct at 21/11/24. [3] Estimated charging times for the standard specification Škoda Elroq. Test data obtained under standardised conditions for comparative purposes. Actual charge times may vary depending on the selected vehicle (and battery option, if available), age, type, condition and temperature of the charger and battery, the level of charge in the battery, the power supply, ambient temperature at the point of use and other environmental factors. The availability of ultra-rapid chargers is currently limited in the UK. They are mainly located on selected motorways and major arterial routes. These chargers are not currently available in Northern Ireland and numbers are low in Scotland, Wales and rural parts of England. Please see Zap Map or other charger location resource for further details. Data correct at 21/11/24.

COMMENT

WHO'S ON THE UP, WHO'S IN DECLINE – AND WHY?

There's plenty to unpick from the UK car registration figures for 2024 (p12): the dramatic growth from fleet sales; conversely, the dramatic fall in private demand; and the failure of most car makers to achieve the EV sales required by the ZEV mandate.

But which brands had the biggest successes and failures? Ford registrations fell by almost a quarter year on year, despite the Puma being the UK's best-selling car. Kia grew by a steady 4% and, such is its stratospheric rise, it now outsells Ford.

Volkswagen is still the biggest brand overall, followed by BMW and Audi. Mercedes is slightly lower in the pecking order for sales but grew by a notable 17% in 2024 – comfortably more than its German rivals. Other significant successes in terms of growth in 2024 were Volvo (up 33%) and Renault (up 36%).

The silliest figures for 2024 were BYD's upturn of 659% (for perspective, it sold 8788 vehicles last year for a 0.06% market share) and Jeep's 193% increase, with 9041 units sold.

There are no clear-cut conclusions to be made about success here. It's a messy market in which sales of combustion cars were held back in some cases and, in others, EVs were disproportionately pushed by incentives.

If there's one judgement to be made, it's this: a breadth of body types and powertrains seems the best bet for victory.

Rachel Burgess, magazine editor
rachel.burgess@haymarket.com

Meanwhile, online...

autocar.co.uk

BMW Alpina B3 GT Touring
After reading the road test (p36), be sure to watch the video. Richard Lane sees if this 522bhp estate is a fitting swansong for Alpina.

What the stars drive
Not all famous people ride in limos or drive supercars: check out this list of celebs who have made really left-field choices.

When Nick Mason came to work at Autocar
In 1986, rock legend Nick Mason joined the ranks at Autocar. Here's what he got up to and why.

Autocar (ISSN 1355-8293 USPS 25-185) is published weekly by Haymarket Media Group, Bridge House, 69 London Road, Twickenham, TW1 3SP, United Kingdom; haymarket.com; tel +44 (0)20 8267 5000

The US annual subscription price is $190.00. Airfreight and mailing in the US by agent named World Container Inc, 150-15, 183rd Street, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Brooklyn, NY 11256. US postmaster: Send address changes to Autocar, Air Business Ltd, c/o World Container Inc, 150-15, 183rd Street, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Subscription records are maintained at the above address. Air Business Ltd is acting as our mailing agent.

Autocar magazine is also published in Estonia, Greece, India, Japan, Latvia, Korea and Thailand.

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BM76 MMW

BMW iX5 TO SPEARHEAD BOLD NEW-MODEL BLITZ

EV taps into new-era tech and starts the final push to electrify every SUV

The BMW iX5 will arrive in 2026 as the first of six new launches in three years that will fully electrify the German firm's SUV line-up.

This engineering programme is being described as one of the most comprehensive ever undertaken by BMW and its M performance car division.

Notably, a hydrogen-powered iX5 will join the line-up in 2028, using a powertrain co-developed with Toyota. This version will be followed by multiple other fuel cell variants of existing models by the end of the decade.

Alongside the pure-electric iX5 due next year, there will be a new, fifth-generation X5 – BMW's original SUV, with 2.2 million sales since 1999 and counting. The new X5 will be fitted with upgraded petrol, diesel and plug-in hybrid drivetrains.

Unlike the upcoming iX3, which will be underpinned by BMW's Neue Klasse platform, both the iX5 and the X5 will be based on an upgraded version of BMW's Cluster Architecture (CLAR) platform, Autocar has been told.

This decision is understood to be a result of the need to continue offering the big-selling X5 with its full cohort of combustion-engine options. Switching to the Neue Klasse architecture would have required the X5's ICE powertrains to be heavily modified to fit into a platform built predominantly for EVs, resulting in excessive extra costs.

The fact that the X5 and iX5 will both be produced at BMW's Spartanburg manufacturing facility in the US, which is currently undergoing a £1.27 billion upgrade, is another reason for the CLAR decision, understands Autocar.

Regardless, BMW will fit the new pair with key features that will be introduced with Neue Klasse. The iX5, for example, is set to adopt

New X5 and iX5 will be launched next year and share the same platform

sixth-generation electric drive components, new-generation batteries with round cells featuring greater energy density than those in use today, and a fully networked 800V electric architecture.

Explaining the process by which the upgraded CLAR platform adopts elements from Neue Klasse, BMW head of R&D Frank Weber said: "We are in a phase where flexibility is required. We have to detach ourselves from how we have perceived platforms up to now.

"There is an increasing realisation that the art of mastering diversity in your portfolio lies in how you use and network major components – engines, motors, battery cells, on-board computers, control units, app functions, and software upgrades.

"It's not so much the platform structure itself but the individual components and how you use them."

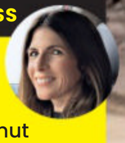
The reworked CLAR platform will also provide the basis for the new X6 and X7 models. The second-generation X7 will be launched in 2027 and the fourth-gen X6 in 2028, according to details provided to US dealers.

The pair are planned to spawn the iX6 and iX7, ▸

"A hydrogen-powered iX5 will be followed by multiple other BMW FCEV models"

IS THIS FINALLY HYDROGEN'S TIME TO SHINE?

RACHEL BURGESS



The BMW X5 could be the first car sold with the full gamut of combustion, plug-in hybrid, battery-electric and, most remarkably, hydrogen (FCEV) power.

The big question is whether an FCEV variant can be a worthy addition to the range, rather than another expensive experiment. After all, when was the last time you saw a Hyundai Nexo or Toyota Mirai on the road?

Yet while the momentum behind hydrogen-powered cars has seemingly slowed to a halt in recent years, BMW has been forging ahead running iX5 prototypes around the world.

And in 2024, it was alone among car makers in securing €1.4 billion from the European Commission as part of broader hydrogen development, so BMW certainly has an incentive to commit to the technology.

Fleet sales naturally dominate with this powertrain type, and in places such as Paris and Frankfurt there are hydrogen filling stations and incentives for taxi drivers. It's a small market but a relevant one.

BMW pioneering hydrogen in Europe might once and for all help make FCEVs a genuine sustainable alternative to battery-electric vehicles in the years to come.

◂ meaning that all of BMW's SUV line-up will offer an electric option.

Disguised prototypes testing in Europe reveal that the new X5 will retain the familiar silhouette of its predecessor. However, its length is expected to exceed five metres for the first time due to a longer wheelbase, required to accommodate the iX5's battery pack. This increase in size will put the iX5 on a par with the luxury-focused iX, which will be facelifted in the first quarter of this year and remain in production until 2028.

The X5 and iX5 will feature design cues from the Neue Klasse concepts, including a new front fascia with triangular-shaped headlights. Insiders have told Autocar a new X-shaped headlight graphic is planned.

As with the new X3, the exterior surfacing treatment for the X5 and iX5 is expected to be less heavily sculpted and to take on a smoother appearance overall. BMW describes the look as being more monolithic, with the characteristic swage lines along the flanks consigned to the past. However, the 10-window glasshouse used for previous X5 models appears to be carried over.

At the rear, an angled tailgate receives a heavily shrouded window for added aerodynamic efficiency. The appearance of quad tailpipes on early prototypes reveals that BMW is already well advanced in the development of the X5 M60. Wheels are set once again to range from 19in to 22in in diameter.

Design cues on the Neue Klasse-based iX3 set the tone for other BMW SUVs

AUTOCAR IMAGE
M EP 3484

The X5 M60 is expected to be the highlight of the new X5 range at launch. Early indications suggest it will be produced with two distinct powertrains – a result of the European Union's stringent CO_2 regulations. In Europe, it will feature a plug-in hybrid set-up focused around a turbocharged 3.0-litre straight six and is likely to be badged the X5 M60e. For the US and Middle East markets, it will instead feature a turbocharged 4.4-litre V8.

An indication of the potential output of the new hybrid-powered M Performance model can be traced to the M760e performance saloon. Its similarly configured petrol-electric powertrain delivers a combined 563bhp and it is fitted with an 18.7kWh battery for a claimed electric range of up to 52.2 miles on the WLTP test cycle.

Despite BMW's decision to take the plug-in hybrid route for the successor to the X5 M50i in Europe, Autocar understands that the more powerful but lower-volume X5 M will continue with an updated version of the existing model's twin-turbocharged 4.4-litre V8 petrol engine.

BMW is also planning an electric iX5 M Performance model. Set to be launched in 2027, it will run a dual-motor drivetrain that develops more than 600bhp.

Less potent X5 models will receive the latest 48V mild-hybrid versions of BMW's turbocharged 3.0-litre straight-six petrol (X5 xDrive40i) and diesel (X5 xDrive40d) engines.

BMW also plans a successor to today's X5 xDrive45e with its turbocharged 3.0-litre petrol six and a new-generation electric motor and battery.

Underneath, the suspension of the new X5 is set to retain double wishbones up front and a multi-link arrangement at the rear, together with standard steel springs and constantly variable damping in both standard and adaptive M set-ups. An air suspension and off-road package will continue to be offered as options, together with BMW's Integral Active Steering.

GREG KABLE

BMW iX7 TO REPLACE iX AS FLAGSHIP EV

An electric version of BMW's flagship X7 SUV will be the biggest EV the car maker will offer, superseding the iX.

Underpinned by the same reworked CLAR platform as the new X7 due in 2027, the iX7 will be positioned as a rival to the likes of Lotus's Eletre.

It is expected to arrive around the same time as its combustion stablemate, which, like the X5, is likely to be sold with a full cohort of ICE options, from pure-petrol and hybrid to, suggests BMW, hydrogen.

Expect design cues to come from the BMW iX3, the production version of the Neue Klasse X that will be revealed in September.

Current X7 was updated in 2022

New iX7 (pictured) is set to arrive a year before its iX6 sibling

AUTOCAR IMAGE

NEW VANTAGE ROADSTER CRANKS IT UP TO 656BHP

Convertible Aston arrives with a revised V8 and serious dynamic intent

VANTAGE
OFFICIAL PICTURES

The new Aston Martin Vantage Roadster is one of the most powerful drop-top sports cars on sale following an extensive, performance-focused upgrade.

With 656bhp and 590lb ft from a reworked version of the existing twin-turbocharged 4.0-litre V8, the new Roadster packs substantially more power than its 505bhp predecessor and has been set up to be a more dynamic proposition.

Now more powerful than rivals such as the Porsche 911 Carrera 4 GTS Cabriolet and Ferrari Roma, the Aston's new power levels even push it to vie with some models in the class above, such as the Maserati MC20 Cielo and McLaren Artura Spider.

The new drop-top follows the coupé that was launched nearly a year ago and was described by Aston as "the most driver-focused and fastest Vantage in the famous nameplate's 74-year history".

The Vantage Roadster draws power from the same Mercedes-AMG-derived powerplant as the coupé. Although the convertible is 60kg heavier, due to its extra rigidity bolstering and roof mechanics, it can still match its sibling in a straight line with a 0-62mph time of 3.5sec. Top speed for both is limited to 202mph.

That makes it as fast as the outgoing 690bhp V12 Vantage Roadster, the most powerful drop-top Aston has produced to date.

It will dispatch 0-62mph in 3.5sec; roof deploys quickly too, at 6.8sec

The car's pace is the result of an "extensive" overhaul of its V8. Aston has added new cam profiles and larger turbos, tweaked compression ratios and improved cooling. The firm has also adjusted the ratios and calibration of the eight-speed automatic gearbox for "punchier" in-gear acceleration and quicker gearchanges.

To improve driving dynamics, the aluminium chassis has been stiffened and work has been done to keep the car at a near-50:50 weight distribution. As before, double wishbones are fitted at the front and multi-link at the rear.

Aston claims the car's rear end is up to 29% stiffer under load, to the benefit of handling and driver feedback. New bespoke-tuned Bilstein DRX adaptive dampers also increase responsiveness.

There is a choice of steel or carbon-ceramic brakes and its standard 21in alloy wheels are shod with bespoke Michelin Pilot Sport S 5 AML tyres.

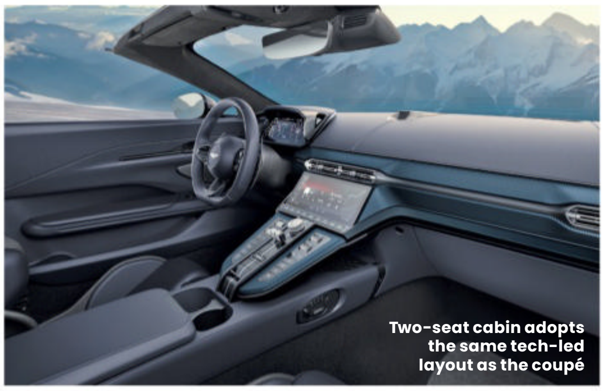
Aston claims the new convertible has the fastest-folding roof on sale today. The cloth top opens or closes in just 6.8 seconds and can be operated at road speeds of up to 31mph. For comparison, the Roma Spider's takes 13.5 seconds.

The new car is visually marked out from its predecessor by a revised front end – notably with a larger grille – and a 30mm increase in width.

Inside, it mirrors the Vantage Coupé, which ushered in a completely new cockpit arrangement. The cabin gets a 10.25in touchscreen, wireless smartphone mirroring and an array of buttons, switches and dials for the most used functions.

Pricing has yet to be announced, but Autocar understands it will start at around £175,000, a £10,000 premium on the coupé. Deliveries begin in April.

WILL RIMELL


Two-seat cabin adopts the same tech-led layout as the coupé

NEW VANTAGE ROADSTER vs RIVALS

	ASTON VANTAGE ROADSTER	**FERRARI ROMA SPIDER**	**MASERATI MC20 CIELO**
Price	£175,000 (est)	£210,000	£235,000
Power	656bhp	612bhp	621bhp
Torque	590lb ft	561lb ft	538lb ft
Weight	1665kg	1556kg	1475kg
0-62mph	3.5sec	3.4sec	2.9sec
Top speed	202mph	199mph	203mph

RENAULT TWINGO REVEALED IN NEAR-PRODUCTION GUISE

New '90%-ready' prototype of £17k EV shows off its retro-modern interior

The new Renault Twingo has edged closer to production with the unveiling of a "90%-ready" prototype at the Brussels motor show, complete with running gear and a full, showroom-spec interior.

Due in the first half of 2026 with a starting price of less than €20,000 (£16,600), the 3750mm-long hatchback will be the entry point into Renault's expanding electric car line-up, sitting beneath the similarly retro-flavoured 4 and 5 hatchbacks, with which it shares the French firm's Ampr Small platform.

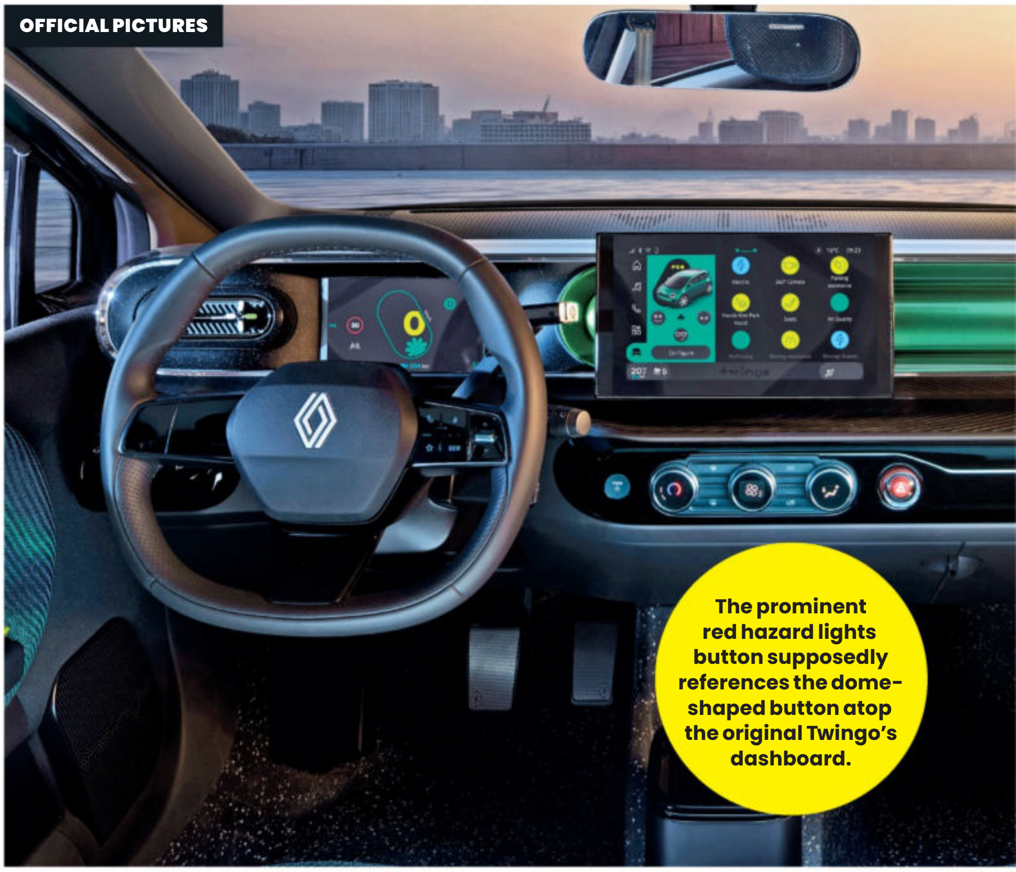
Renault aims to take the car from conception to the road in less than two years and has partnered an unnamed Chinese consultancy in a bid to make the engineering and production processes as efficient as possible.

In spite of its low projected list price (which puts it in the realm of the petrol-engined Kia Picanto and Hyundai i10), the four-seat city car features a host of "upper-segment technology" inside and is described as a "joyful, trendy" proposition.

The newly revealed interior is clearly related to that of Renault's larger EVs, dominated as it is by a 7.0in digital instrument cluster and a 10.1in infotainment touchscreen, but it makes obvious nods to the cabin of the original Twingo from 1992.

Beyond the interior's retro-modern design, Renault said every aspect has been "designed to make life easier",

Twingo uses same platform as new 5 but is 170mm shorter


OFFICIAL PICTURES

The prominent red hazard lights button supposedly references the dome-shaped button atop the original Twingo's dashboard.

MAZDA BRINGS 345-MILE MODEL 3 RIVAL TO UK

THE MAZDA 6 will return to UK showrooms in early 2026 as a sleek, rear-wheel-drive, electric fastback to rival the Tesla Model 3.

Named the 6e, it will offer two motors and two battery packs. The entry-level car has 241bhp and a 68.8kWh battery, which yields 300 miles of range and a 0-62mph time of 7.8sec. The range-topper gets 254bhp and an 80kWh pack, giving it 345 miles and 0-62mph in 7.6sec.

The smaller pack can be charged at rates of up to 200kW, allowing a 10-80% top-up in 22 minutes, but the larger one is limited to 95kW, taking 45 minutes.

Unlike the MX-30 electric crossover, the 6e won't be offered with a petrol range-extender powertrain.

The 6e ushers in the next evolution of Mazda's Kodo design language, with a low roofline, frameless doors and LED lights encircling the front grille.

Those lights, described as 'wings' by Mazda, 'flutter' to indicate how full the battery is during a charging session.

The car also features an active rear spoiler and rides on 19in alloy wheels.

Inside, it does away with physical buttons, relegating most functions to a centrally mounted 14.6in infotainment touchscreen, in a departure from recent Mazdas, such as the CX-60.

This approach reflects the 6e's provenance: it was originally developed with Mazda's Chinese joint-venture partner, Changan, specifically to meet the tastes of buyers in China, where it's sold as the EZ-6.

However, the steering, suspension and braking have been "carefully calibrated" by Mazda Research Europe in Germany to match European drivers' preferences.

There's seating for five and cargo space is rated at 400 litres in total, split between 330 litres in the traditional boot and 70 litres under the bonnet.

Prices are expected to start below £40,000.

OFFICIAL PICTURES

highlighting a range of features that boost storage capacity and utility.

The floor of the prototype is finished in cork, chosen for its durability and resistance, but Renault noted that "show cars are an opportunity to explore and test new ideas", so this material seems unlikely to make it into customer cars.

Externally, little has been changed from the 2023 concept, but there's now a concealed air intake in the front bumper, the rear arches have shrunk slightly and the protective corner cladding at each end now has a honeycomb design.

In a concession to production viability, the door handles no longer light up and the semi-circular brake lights have been joined at the bottom by another LED strip.

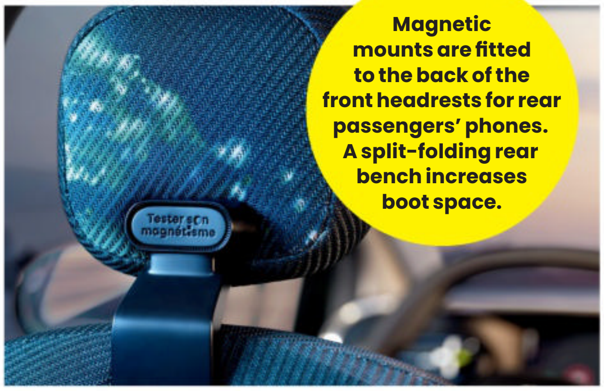
Renault said the latest evolution of the Twingo is drivable, and while it has offered no further details about the powertrain, it is understood to be closely related to that used in the 5.

The company has also yet to confirm plans to sell the Twingo in the UK, after CEO Luca de Meo told Autocar last month that developing a right-hand-drive variant would be "a challenge".

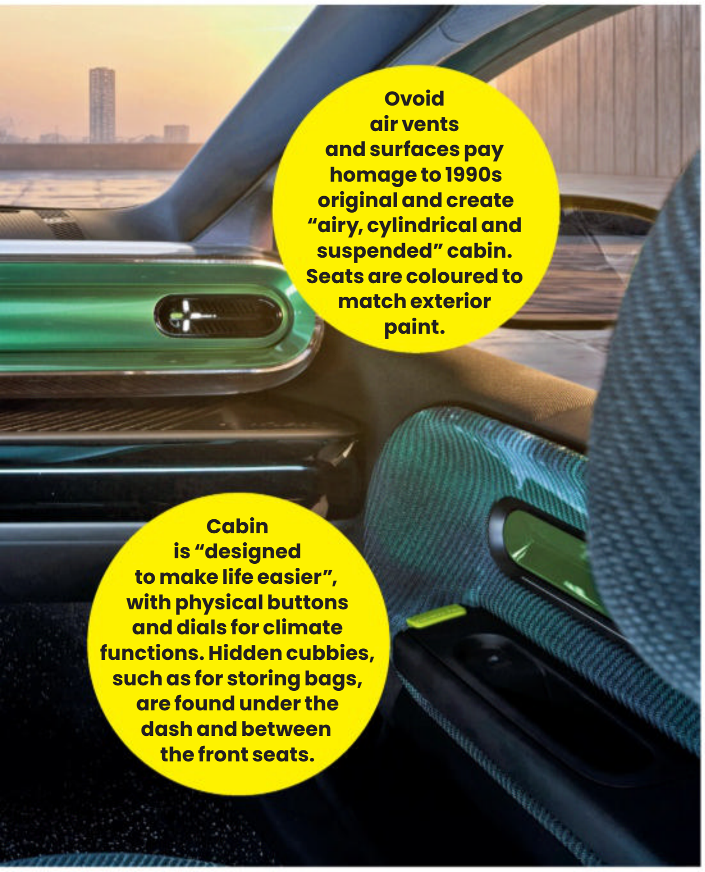
He said Renault "needed to find a business case" but acknowledged that it could be helped by its tie-up with Nissan, which will sell its next-generation Micra, another Ampr Small-based EV, with RHD in its home market of Japan.

"When they want the wheel on the other side too, it becomes less complicated," said de Meo.

FELIX PAGE

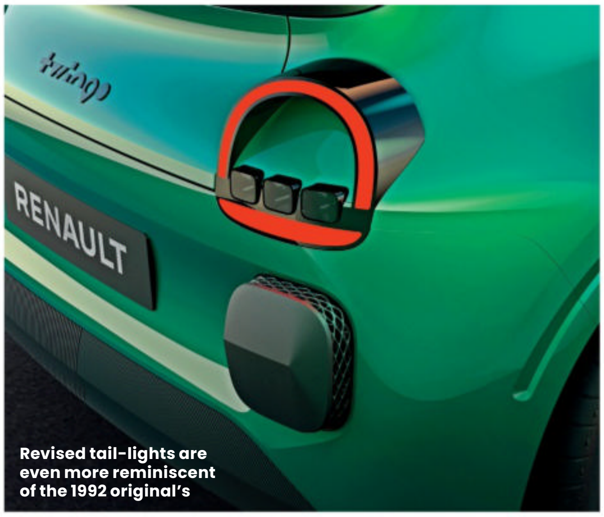


Magnetic mounts are fitted to the back of the front headrests for rear passengers' phones. A split-folding rear bench increases boot space.



Ovoid air vents and surfaces pay homage to 1990s original and create "airy, cylindrical and suspended" cabin. Seats are coloured to match exterior paint.

Cabin is "designed to make life easier", with physical buttons and dials for climate functions. Hidden cubbies, such as for storing bags, are found under the dash and between the front seats.



Revised tail-lights are even more reminiscent of the 1992 original's

RENAULT 5 WINS CAR OF THE YEAR

The Renault 5 and Alpine A290 have jointly won the coveted Car of the Year (COTY) award for 2025.

The French electric supermini siblings were awarded 353 points by a jury of 60 judges from 23 countries.

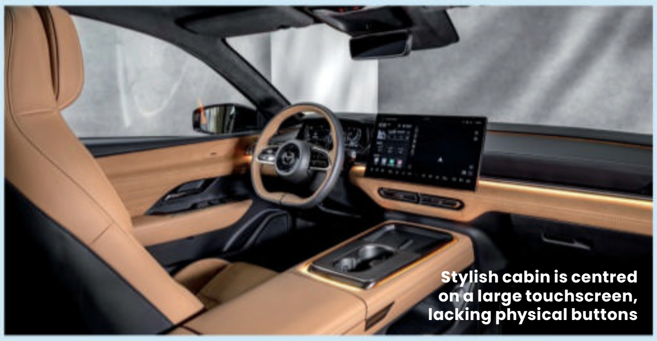
The runner-up, the Kia EV3, received 291 points, while the Citroën C3/ë-C3 completed the podium with 215.

They were followed by the Hyundai Inster (172), Dacia Duster (168), Cupra Terramar (165) and Alfa Romeo Junior (136).

The Renault Scenic won top honours in 2024, which means Renault is only the second brand ever to win back-to-back gongs, after Fiat with the 1995 Punto and 1996 Bravo/Brava.

Autocar is a sponsor of COTY, with editor Mark Tisshaw having a seat on its jury.

6e looks identical to Chinese-market EZ-6 but will drive differently



Stylish cabin is centred on a large touchscreen, lacking physical buttons

ABARTH BROADENS EV'S APPEAL

Prices for the Abarth 500e hot hatch have been cut by £4220 for a new starting price of £29,975.

Fiat's performance brand is targeting the burgeoning fleet market, which accounted for 80.2% (306,451) of EV sales in 2024. The price cut replaces the £3000 'e-grant' that Abarth had offered through dealers to private buyers. Reducing the car's list price instead means fleet customers can also now benefit from a lower price.

ABARTH
RE23 UXF

CHINA'S XPENG TEES UP FIRST THREE CARS FOR UK

EV maker to follow G6 crossover with seven-seat MPV and Audi Q6 rival

The futuristic Xpeng X9 MPV and G9 SUV will join the G6 crossover in UK showrooms from next year as the brand moves towards a five-strong UK line-up of premium, fast-charging EVs by 2028.

Solihull-based importer International Motors (IM) – which sells GWM, Isuzu and Subaru vehicles in the UK – has added the technology-focused Chinese EV brand to its portfolio.

IM will start delivering the Xpeng G6 crossover (see box, right) in the spring, with prices expected to slightly undercut its chief rival, the Tesla Model Y.

IM managing director William Brown outlined to Autocar plans to flesh out the Xpeng model line-up and dealer network over the coming years in a bid to cement the marque as the UK's "number-one Chinese premium EV brand".

The X9 is a radically shaped seven-seater that blends elements of MPV and SUV. It will be positioned as the flagship of Xpeng's UK line-up when it's launched and pricing will be "competitive compared with other luxury vehicles".

Brown cited the Kia EV9 and Volkswagen ID Buzz as potential rivals for the X9 and suggested that the company will give a clearer indication of pricing around the middle of the year.

In China, the X9 is offered with a choice of single- and dual-motor powertrains with up to 496bhp and 472lb ft of torque and the option of 84.5kWh or 101.5kWh battery packs for a claimed maximum range of up to 436 miles (on China's generous CLTC cycle).

Like the G6, the X9 is equipped with 800V electricals, so it can charge at speeds of up to 330kW.

Adaptive dual-chamber air suspension ensures "the most comfortable driving experience", said Xpeng.

OFFICIAL PICTURES

X9 follows Xpeng's tech-led minimalist approach to design

Meanwhile, the X9's cavernous, flat-floored interior can "accommodate camping and sports equipment" even with the third row of seats in place, according to the company, and with the middle and rear benches folded down there is up to 2554 litres of load capacity.

The third Xpeng model due in the UK – towards the end of 2026 – is the G9, a mid-sized premium SUV in the vein of the Audi Q6 E-tron and Polestar 3. It has up to 543bhp and an official maximum range of 323 miles, plus the ability to add 62 miles of range in as little as five minutes from a 300kW charger.

Beyond that, IM plans to add two more Xpeng EVs in the UK by mid-2027, but these are understood to be still in development and have not yet been launched in China.

Importantly, said Brown, IM will only import products that are well suited to the UK market, rather than looking to launch the whole gamut of Xpeng models.

IM aims to be selling Xpengs from 20 UK dealers by the end of the year and to notch up around 2000 sales of the G6 in 2025.

It will "ramp up the dealer representation" as more models come on stream, said Brown, but "we're fairly pragmatic, because this is an EV-only brand. There are some really good EV operators out there. If they're not in the right location, we would probably sacrifice the location for the right operator."

Asked what will give Xpeng models the edge over the equivalent Tesla models, for example, Brown cited his perception that the American EV brand's long-held reputation as a leader in public fast charging is dissipating as rival DC networks grow.

He also touted Xpeng's focus on software, design and quality as features that will bolster the brand's standing in a European context.

FELIX PAGE

"Xpeng aims to notch up around 2000 UK sales of the G6 this year"

WHAT'S THE G6 LIKE ON UK ROADS?

The Xpeng G6 will be sold in the UK in two forms. The entry-level Standard Range car takes 254bhp from a single rear motor and has a 66kWh battery for an official range of 270 miles, while the Long Range model gets 281bhp, 87kWh and 354 miles. They are expected to be priced between £40,000 and £45,000, undercutting the equivalent versions of the best-selling Tesla Model Y.

We had a brief go in the Long Range on battered country lanes around Solihull, pending a full road test in the coming weeks, and came away impressed.

It's agreeably swift off the mark and commendably quiet at a cruise. The ride feels markedly less fussy and more composed over rough ground than the Tesla Model Y's, too. There's little life to the steering and a fair bit of roll in sharp bends, but full-bore driver thrills are plainly not the aim here. Visibility is excellent and the steering predictable.

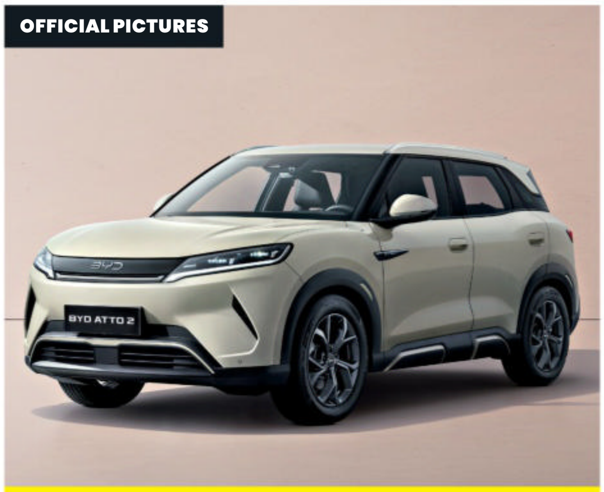
The cabin is similarly minimalist to the Model Y's but the perceived quality is better. The infotainment screen is intuitive, crisp and, because it uses ultra-advanced Qualcomm Snapdragon chips, remarkably quick.

Seven-seat X9 is an upmarket MPV to rival the likes of the Kia EV9

Deliveries of G6 (middle) will start in spring; X9 (left) and G9 in 2026

READ FULL G6 REVIEW ONLINE

OFFICIAL PICTURES



BYD TAKES FIGHT TO FRONTERA EV WITH NEW ATTO 2

BYD HAS CONFIRMED the European specification of its new Atto 2 crossover, positioning it as a rival for the likes of the Renault 4, Vauxhall Frontera and Toyota Urban Cruiser.

At launch, the Chinese EV will be available with a single motor that sends 174bhp to the front wheels, with power drawn from a 45.1kWh battery for a range of 194 miles.

For reference, the entry-level Renault 4 (which isn't offered in the UK) packs a 118bhp motor and a 40kWh battery that yields 190 miles between charges.

The battery is fitted to the car using cell-to-body construction, which is claimed to boost chassis rigidity.

A smaller sibling to the existing Atto 3, the new Atto 2 measures 4.31m long, 1.83m wide and 1.68m tall, positioning it to serve as a higher-riding alternative to BYD's Dolphin hatchback.

Inside, the Atto 2 offers seating for five as well as a 400-litre boot capacity, which is on a par with the Volkswagen ID 3's.

It also features BYD's familiar 15.6in infotainment touchscreen, which can be rotated to display in both portrait and landscape orientations.

Pricing has yet to be confirmed, but the Atto 2 is expected to broadly align with the Frontera in the mid-£20,000s, as BYD looks to establish itself within the European mainstream.

Conservative exterior design is similar to larger Atto 3 EV's

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UK NOW THE BIGGEST EV MARKET IN EUROPE

Fleet sales propel the UK past Germany to top Europe's EV charts

The UK is now the largest electric car market in Europe, with more than 380,000 new electric cars sold in 2024.

A big reason for the UK's 21.4% annual rise in EV sales, according to figures from the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, was the scrap between car makers as they strove to get as close as possible to the UK's zero-emission vehicles mandate target by adding their own incentives and throttling ICE car sales at the end of the year.

Surprisingly, the UK outsold Germany, a key market for electric cars in Europe that has experienced years of growth. However, the momentum of EV sales in Germany faltered for two main reasons: its government withdrew incentives midway through the year and there was the arrival of the European Union's import tariff of up to 35% on Chinese-made EVs, such as the MG 4, one of the market's best-sellers. As a result, EV sales in Germany fell 27.4% to 380,609 – 1350 short of the UK's 381,959.

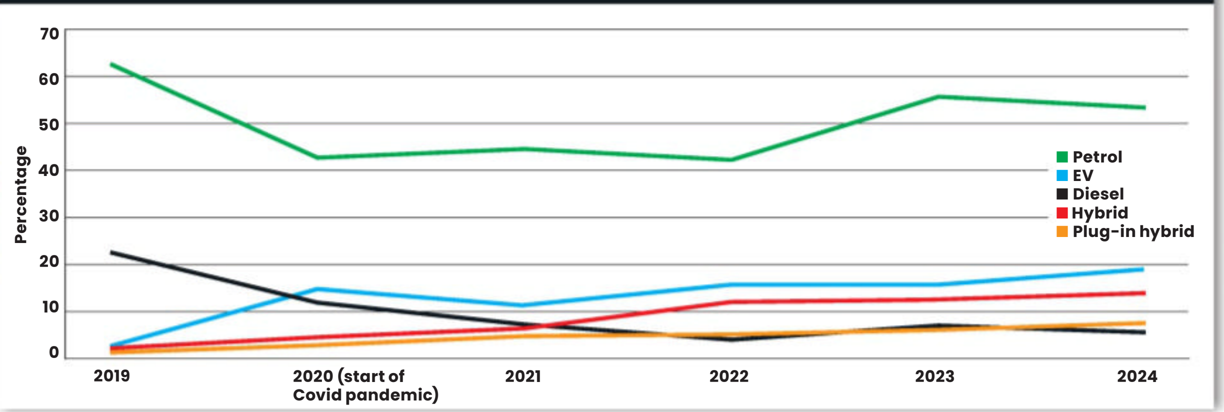
Last year ended with EVs commanding a UK market share of 19.6%. Although that is below the ZEV mandate's sales mix target of 22%, it is still EVs' biggest slice of the car parc to date. Electric remained the UK's second-most-popular powertrain behind petrol (52.2%), sales of which fell by around 40,000 cars to 1.02 million in 2024.

However, the figures also reveal that 80.2% (306,451) of all EV sales were made by fleets. More significantly,

Paul Philpott, CEO, Kia UK

"There aren't enough carrots for the consumers, other than in the fleet market – and the fleet user-chooser is proving that where they have relatively sensible incentives behind electric vehicles, buyers want to try them."

FUEL TYPES: HOW MARKET SHARE HAS CHANGED



Puma was the UK's 2024 top seller; Gen-E EV (left) will boost its 2025 sales

private buyers accounted for just 38.2% of all new cars sold, at 746,000 units. That is 1000 fewer than Covid-hit 2020, when car buying was temporarily halted by lockdowns.

This is problematic for the car industry, SMMT boss Mike Hawes told reporters, because the market's dependency on fleet sales is growing to an unsustainable level. In 2022, for instance, private sales outstripped fleets (50.7% market share versus 46.5%), showing how the landscape is changing.

Hawes attributed the drop in private sales to "the confusion for buyers of which vehicle to buy", a comment aimed at mixed messaging from the UK government in recent years.

This, he said, was a key reason for many car makers not hitting the government's ZEV mandate target, with just one in 10 new cars sold to private buyers being battery-powered.

"If we did not have the [ZEV] mandate, we would say that this was a good year," he said.

Hawes added that the 2024 sales figures were evidence that the government needs to bring back EV buying incentives, which were dropped in 2022. The SMMT wants lowered VAT on new EV purchases and VAT parity between public and home charging.

"Incentives make a big difference, as they help people into these vehicles while also sending the right messages," said Hawes. He added that an equivalent alternative to current fleet incentives – delivered via benefit-in-kind tax breaks – should be offered to private buyers.

Hawes claimed car makers are already shelling out billions of pounds in lowered car prices to entice buyers in their bid to hit the ZEV mandate target, but "manufacturer incentives show an unhealthy market".

One such manufacturer is Fiat, which last week slashed £4000 off the price of its Abarth 500e and Fiat 600e in an attempt to attract more buyers, especially from the burgeoning fleet market.

There are indications of an appetite for change from the new Labour government, which has launched a consultation on potentially amending the ZEV mandate. However, Hawes warned that any changes – expected at the end of 2025 at the earliest – might be too late, as "a number of car makers have warned me they won't hit mandate targets this year".

For 2025, car makers must, in real terms, increase their EV sales by 46% in order to hit the mandate's new 28% sales-mix target – goals that increase each year to 80% by 2030.

The SMMT claims this won't be achieved. Of the 1.97 million new cars that it predicts will be sold this year, just 23.3% are expected to be EVs.

WILL RIMELL

Mike Hawes, CEO, SMMT

"This should be a success story, with a record share of EV sales and overall numbers up. But instead, the cost of delivering that, and that EV sales are still shy of the government's EV targets, casts a shadow."

WILL UK IMPOSE TARIFFS ON CHINA'S EVs?

The UK may be pressured into imposing tariffs on Chinese-made EVs, mirroring those levied by the European Union.

The EU now imposes a tariff of up to 35.3% on EVs arriving from China, on top of a pre-existing 10% import tariff. The new tariff is intended to counter low prices made possible by Chinese government subsidies.

When the EU finalised the new tariff last October, the UK opted not to follow suit. UK trade secretary Jonathan Reynolds said he had concerns about mooted retaliatory tariffs from China.

But Mike Hawes, CEO of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, warned that the government may be pushed into changing its policy when US president-elect Donald Trump comes into power, given his vocal contempt of Chinese-made products.

Currently, the US has a 100% tariff on Chinese-made EVs, imposed by president Joe Biden last year. Despite the 'special relationship' between the US and the UK, the US has not yet weighed in on the UK's position. The arrival of Trump, a much more vocal president, might change that.

"Political pressure can change it," said Hawes. "Trump isn't in the White House yet, but he is in a matter of days, and how quickly he will act, and in what way he will act, is still to be seen."

Previously, Trump has said Chinese electric car makers "are going to have to pay a big price" and quoted tariffs of up to 500%. He also warned that all cars imported to the US could be hit with a 100% tariff. That would put the UK in a difficult position because the US accounts for around 20% of the UK's automotive exports. Changing its stance might be one way the UK could avoid those US import tariffs.

Chinese-built EVs like the MG 4 are subject to hefty tariffs in the EU and US

2024 BEST-SELLERS

1 Ford Puma **48,340 sales**

2 Kia Sportage **47,163**

3 Nissan Qashqai **42,418**

4 Nissan Juke **34,454**

5 Tesla Model Y **32,862**

6 Volkswagen Golf **32,370**

7 Hyundai Tucson **32,174**

8 MG HS **30,207**

9 Volvo XC40 **30,202**

10 Volkswagen Polo **28,891**

SONY-HONDA AFEELA 1 EV ON SALE NEXT YEAR

Tech-rich 482bhp saloon has been revealed in near-production form

The Afeela 1, the first car from the joint venture between Honda and technology giant Sony, will be launched in 2026 with 482bhp from a dual-motor powertrain and be priced from the equivalent of £72,000 in entry-level form.

The sleek electric saloon from Sony Honda Mobility (SHM) was first shown in 2023 and what is described as a near-production version has now been revealed at the 2025 CES tech event in Las Vegas.

It will go on sale in California first, then other US states. Production for other markets has yet to be confirmed.

SHM boss Yasuhide Mizuno demonstrated one of the Afeela 1's advanced functions by calling it onto the stage by a voice command into his phone – although it isn't yet clear if that will be offered on production models.

When deliveries start in mid-2026, the Afeela 1 will be available in the higher of two planned trim levels, offering a claimed range of up to 300 miles and advanced autonomous driving functions.

Under the partnership between the two Japanese firms, Honda will essentially provide the technical underpinnings of the EV, which are understood to be the same platform as the Honda 0 Series range of cars (see story, right), while Sony will be responsible for the in-vehicle technology and user interface.

The Afeela 1 will feature a 241bhp electric motor mounted on each axle for a combined 482bhp and draw power from a 91kWh lithium ion battery that can be charged at speeds of up to 150kW.

SHM said the car would offer "a sense of unity with the driver" through "nimble and stable handling".

Meanwhile, a 3D motion management system that includes robotics-based posture control technology is claimed to be able to adjust the motors, brakes and suspension to optimise ride comfort.

The Afeela 1 uses double-wishbone front suspension and a multi-link rear.

The 4915mm-long saloon has a wheelbase of 3018mm and is 1460mm tall.

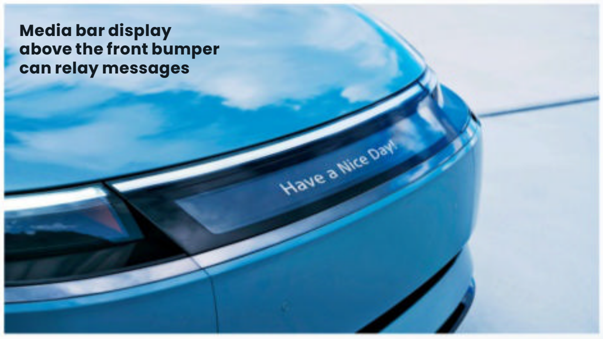
It has a novel media bar at the front of its bonnet, which can be used as an external information display, plus there's an active rear spoiler.

Inside, the Afeela 1 has a yoke-style steering wheel, a large panoramic screen and active noise-cancelling technology. While the set-up is touchscreen-based, there is also a physical rotary dial, similar to BMW's old iDrive controller.

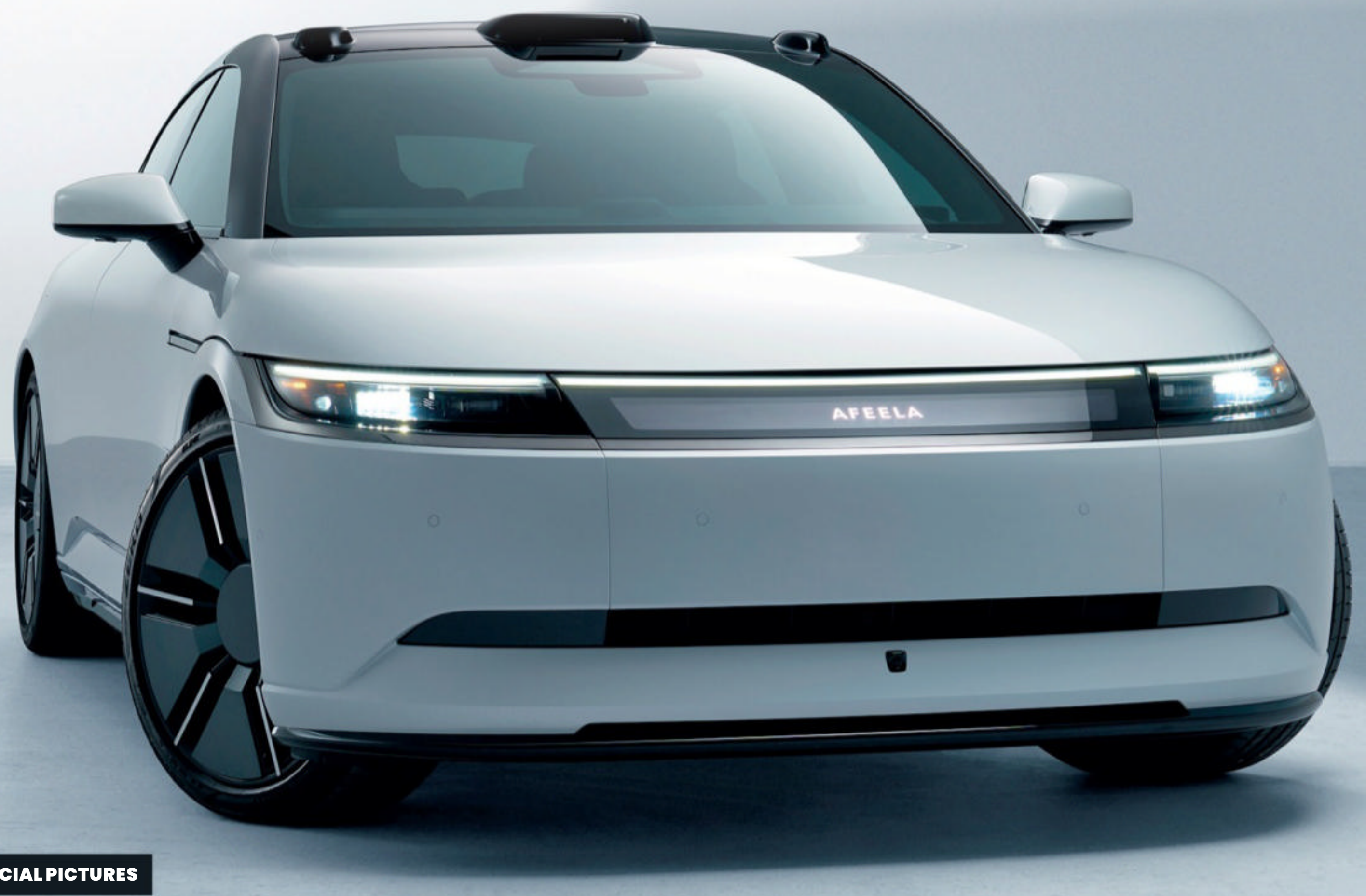
The EV will arrive next year in top-spec Signature trim, which is priced at $102,900 (£83,750). Entry-level Origin models, sold exclusively in black, will follow in 2027.

JAMES ATTWOOD

Yoke-like steering wheel, touchscreen and rotary controller feature



Media bar display above the front bumper can relay messages



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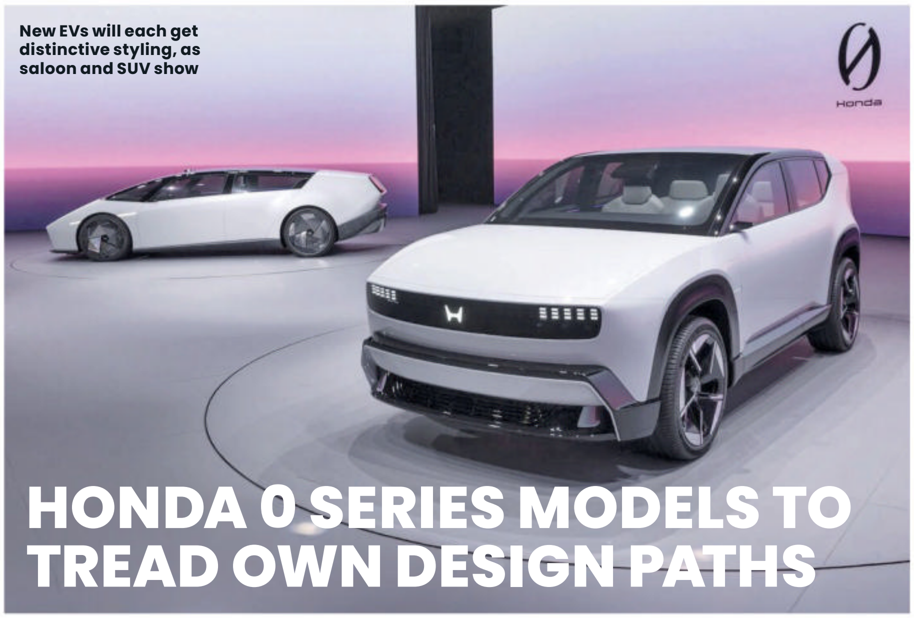


New EVs will each get distinctive styling, as saloon and SUV show

HONDA 0 SERIES MODELS TO TREAD OWN DESIGN PATHS

FUTURE MODELS IN Honda's 0 Series EV line-up will each receive distinctive styling, although there will be a shared focus on bold and simple design language.

The first two of seven new EVs due by 2030 have been previewed by the 0 SUV and 0 Saloon prototypes, shown at this year's CES tech event.

The two share some key design philosophies and a focus on interior space. But unlike many car families, such as VW's ID range, they will have markedly different treatments for their overall proportions and important styling elements such as the front end and lighting.

Toshinobu Minami, head of Honda's design centre, said the focus on the two initial 0 Series models was to "give them strong characteristics", because "in a world with a lot of new players" the EV "could become a bit of a commodity. But these are very different and we wanted to give them a distinct character."

Minami added: "We wanted distinctive design to be a pillar of the 0 Series models."

The 0 SUV, which will be the first 0 Series model to go on sale, was "very close" to production, said Minami, adding that the bolder 0 Saloon needed "a bit of treatment, but the size and shape will remain the same".

According to Minami, "trying to make the design as pure as possible" will be a pillar of the 0 Series line-up, but he added: "We will try to unify the design but they will not be exactly the same aside from size.

"We will have a wide spread of a line-up, with more variety than you would be used to from a European premium brand."

The 0 Series is a stark departure from Honda's existing line-up, but Minami said future ICE models won't adopt similar designs.

The 0 SUV and 0 Saloon will be joined next year by what is described as a ZR-V-sized "entry-level SUV". It has been developed with a focus on the Asian market and Honda hasn't yet decided if it will be offered in Europe.

Likewise, not all seven of the 0 Series models will be offered in every region, although the 0 SUV and 0 Saloon will be global.

TYPE R STILL IN FRAME FOR EVs

Honda hasn't ruled out the prospect of a hot 0 Series range-topper that could carry the fabled Type R badge.

Toshihiro Akiwa, head of Honda's BEV development centre, said: "With a battery model that has different torque characteristics, you cannot come up with something that is exactly the same as before.

"With EVs, you have to ask how you can provide the joy of driving. We haven't given up, but it's not a simple case of adding horsepower. You need to think about sound, vibrations and the feelings a human can expect. We are looking at solutions to that and we wanted to come up with a proposal."

SMALL HONDA EVs PLANNED FOR 2030s

Honda plans to develop a new platform for small EVs so that it can expand into the burgeoning affordable EV market – but not until next decade.

While its focus is on developing its 0 Series EVs, with seven models planned on a bespoke platform, they can't go smaller than the ZR-V-sized 'entry-level' SUV.

Katsushi Inoue, boss of Honda's electrification unit, said "the small EV market is growing and we are thinking about it", with reference to making sub-$30,000 (£24,000) EVs.

To do that, Toshihiro Akiwa, head of Honda's BEV development centre, said: "We will need to develop a new platform."

Honda has previously sold a small EV, the E, but a short range and a high price yielded poor sales.

Next big thing

JESSE CROSSE

New lithium-sulphur batteries boost range, cut weight and cost less

STELLANTIS TOUTS EXCITING ADVANCE IN BATTERY TECH

CLAIMS OF REVOLUTIONARY breakthroughs in EV battery technology come and go on a frequent basis. But it looks as though Stellantis has turned a corner with lithium-sulphur technology, which promises to halve the cost per kWh, improve rapid-charging speed by 50% and weigh significantly less. Stellantis says the new batteries are "targeted" to power its vehicles by 2030.

The technology is being developed in collaboration with Texas-based Zeta Energy, which was founded to develop lithium-sulphur batteries in 2014 and has been working on them ever since. The key thing with the new battery is the amount of energy it can store for its weight, known as the gravimetric energy density.

Energy density figures for lithium ion batteries vary depending on the type of battery and the ingredients used in them. The choice of ingredients also has a bearing on its environmental credentials and sustainability.

Two of the most common types of battery today are lithium-iron-phosphate and nickel-manganese-cobalt. The advantage of an NMC battery is higher energy density while LFP batteries are considered to be intrinsically safer and longer-lasting and use cheaper, less environmentally harmful elements. Lithium-sulphur promises the best of both worlds and requires no nickel, manganese, cobalt or graphite.

The main differences lie in the chemistry of the cathode (positive electrode) and anode (negative electrode) in each cell. All existing lithium ion EV batteries have graphite-based anodes, with cathodes consisting of the materials that give each different type its name.

The Zeta Energy cathode is based on sulphurised carbon materials. The company says it is stable and gives better performance than existing metal-based cathodes.

The other major part is the anode. One of the earliest prototype lithium batteries had a lithium metal anode that in theory allows ultra-fast charging and high energy density. One of the problems is that lithium metal anodes grow dendrites, which are like tentacles that reach out towards the cathode. Eventually these deadly structures penetrate the separator membrane between the two electrodes, causing a short circuit and destroying the battery. The lithium-sulphur battery has metallic anodes but they consist of vertically aligned carbon nanotubes (imagine microscopic carbon drinking straws standing on end and packed with lithium ions), which don't produce dendrites.

Given that a battery pack can be 40% of the cost of an EV, the new battery has the potential to make EVs substantially cheaper.

Meanwhile, Stellantis has just announced a £3.4 billion joint venture with CATL to build an LFP factory in Zaragoza, Spain. The new plant will help underpin its existing "dual chemistry" approach of using both LFP and NMC batteries in its cars.

THE WORLD'S REMOTEST EV CHARGER… IS BRITISH?

Mid-Atlantic island of St Helena aims to become first all-electric territory

A British Overseas Territory is aiming to be the first territory in the world to switch entirely to EVs.

St Helena, an extremely remote volcanic island in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, is home to just over 5000 people, many of whom run decaying Ford Fiestas, Ford Transits and Land Rover Defenders. But the local government wants to wean itself from these older, more polluting cars in favour of EVs run on green energy.

Supporters of the scheme say St Helena is arguably the perfect place for EVs, as it's never too hot or too cold to affect batteries and its location means green energy is easy to obtain.

Currently 25% of the island's energy comes from a single modest wind and solar farm, with the rest generated by a diesel-fuelled power station, fuel for which is imported.

"We spend about £5 million a year bringing diesel in," said Mark Brooks, minister of the treasury and economic development. "But it's not just the cost to buy the diesel, it's also the cost to transport the diesel to the island and then transfer it into our storage. So we're looking to transition to more renewable energy production. We want to get to 80% from renewable energy by 2028."

He continued: "It is entirely possible that we can run an entire island from renewable energy. We could only have diesel generation in terms of resilience in case something goes wrong with the renewables."

Jamestown charger dispenses locally generated energy

> "We can run an entire island from renewable energy"

St Helena has only around 85 miles of road and a 30mph speed limit

To prove that EVs could be used en masse on St Helena, Brooks and his team imported a Subaru Solterra and borrowed a charger from Norwegian company Easee to be installed in the island's capital, Jamestown. This is currently the remotest public charger in the world.

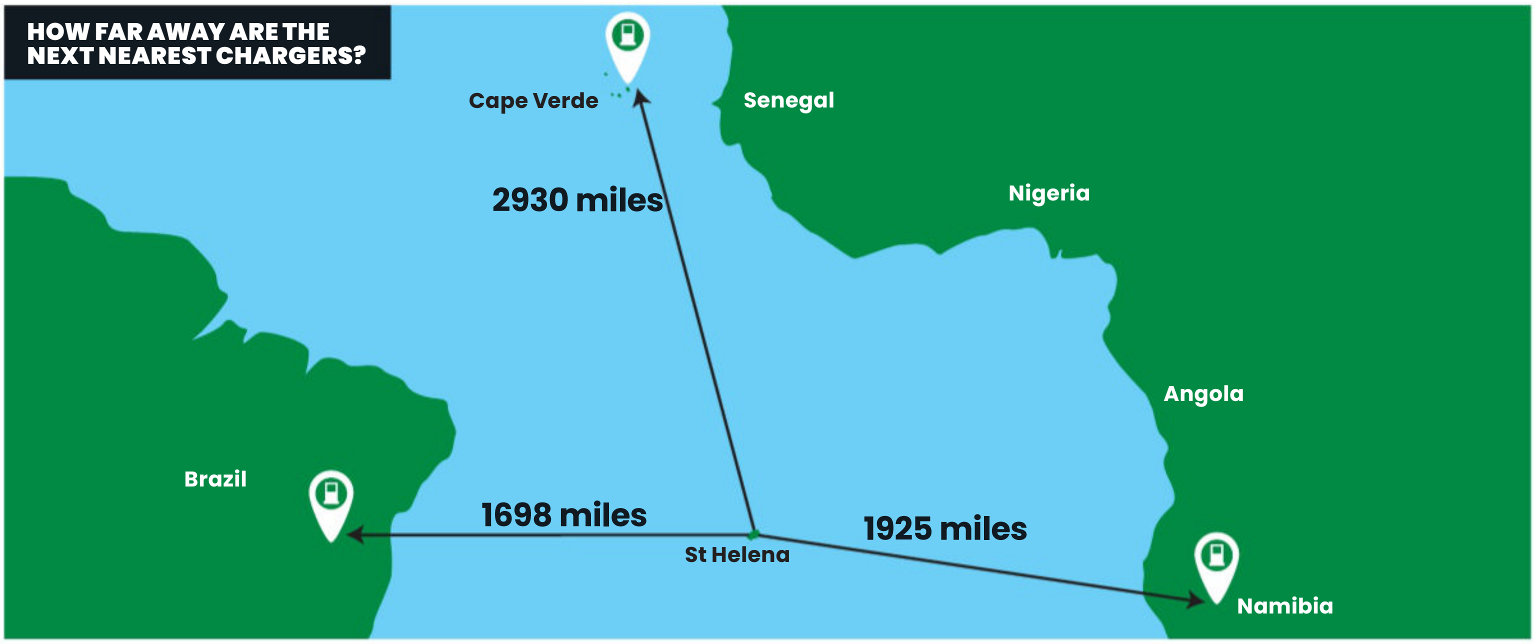
The impact of the trial was immediate: three islanders offered to buy the Solterra and the charger will stay on the island and is set to be one of a network of chargers used for a new fleet of EVs coming to St Helena in 2025.

The ball is now in the court of the local government.

British businessman Derek Pedley, who is one of five people to already be running an EV on the island, told Autocar that the powertrain's simplicity will lead to hundreds of EVs being imported within the next five years.

His confidence has led him to begin importing a small fleet of electric Minis. He will also drape them with

HOW FAR AWAY ARE THE NEXT NEAREST CHARGERS?



SUBARUS WAY OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

The Solterra turned out to be the perfect EV to test on St Helena. Why? Because, surprisingly, the island has a bustling Subaru culture.

Despite being 1200 miles from the nearest land, a few brave souls have imported some Japanese-market classics, including a dozen Subaru Impreza WRXs – perfect for the handful of switchback mountain roads, all of which would make sublime rally stages.

The local Subaru owners gathered to see the Solterra.

Alex Hudson, who is in his third Impreza, a UK-market 2006 WRX, said: "With all the steep bends on the roads here, all-wheel drive is perfect, so Subarus have kind of got under our skin on St Helena.

"They used to be cheap, but now they have gone up in value, which is nice.

"I like the look of the electric one. It's good to see Subaru coming up with new tech. But I'm not selling my Impreza!"

the St Helena flag.

"The experience that I have had running an electric car on the island has been nothing but positive. It's been very reliable," said Pedley. "Repairs have been basically [only related to the] brakes and tyres, which are standard on any vehicle. I think the transition is about to begin."

A big pull for St Helena is its lack of import tax, meaning EVs will be cheaper to buy there than in the UK proper.

However, wages are low (£9000 per annum on average), meaning the government is having to look for other incentives when it comes to generating mass appeal for EVs.

JEREMY HART

It's essentially a bigger Duster, although still only a five-seater

BIGSTER £5K LESS THAN MAIN RIVALS

THE NEW DACIA Bigster will cost from £24,995 when it arrives in March, making it one of the cheapest SUVs in the C-segment, heavily undercutting rivals such as the Kia Sportage and Nissan Qashqai (both £30k).

Entry-level Expression trim gives buyers a 10.1in touchscreen, parking sensors, keyless entry and 17in alloy wheels.

Power comes from Renault's TCe 140 mild-hybrid engine, a 1.2-litre turbo petrol triple with a 48V electric motor.

For £3000 more, the Bigster gets Renault's Hybrid 155 powertrain, which pairs a 107bhp atmo petrol four with two electric motors and a 1.4kWh battery.

In combination with top-rung Extreme trim – which adds roof bars, 18in alloys and a panoramic roof – this tops the line-up at £29,495.

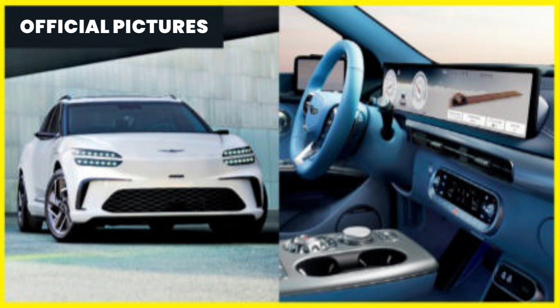
MAKEOVER FOR GV60

The Genesis GV60 has been updated with a sportier look and reworked interior tech.

More prominent vents and a new headlight design have been introduced and the wheel arches are now body-coloured.

Inside, the mid-sized electric crossover receives a revised dashboard screen, combining the infotainment and digital instrument sections.

It is expected to arrive in the UK this summer, priced slightly above the current £58,565.



Grapevine

MARK TISSHAW

Policy pendulum makes life tough for car firms in the US, says Kia's Center

"GOD HELP YOU," says Kia America COO Steve Center when asked what he thinks of the UK's ZEV mandate, which forces car makers to sell a set proportion of their overall cars as EVs, regardless of demand. "You can tell manufacturers what to make but you can't tell consumers what to buy."

We could probably say the same back to Center, who like all executives in the US this week will be braced for just what awaits them when Donald Trump returns to the White House.

Policies he has mooted include enormous tariffs on all cars imported into the US and a reversal of both buyer incentives and manufacturer subsidies for building EVs and battery factories in the US.

Center is diplomatic in not talking personalities or political parties yet says "it's very difficult to stop a freight train" after "auto companies and consumers have all been motivated to change their production and their preferences".

"A reversal in some of the regulations is going to do a lot of damage to a lot of businesses, because you've committed capital based on a certain set of assumptions," he says.

The US market is a complex place to do business at the best of times, due to the vast scale of the place, different consumer preferences in different areas and different policies both between states and nationally.

"We've had different parts of the government regulating the same thing differently sometimes and regulating more things," says Center. "Then you have California steering from the rear. It's very difficult to make long-term decisions when you're investing capital in an environment where the rules are going to change every four years."

California has the highest rate of EV adoption in the US, and some states have now followed it in introducing their own ZEV mandates "without consumer demand" to match.

Center continues: "Then there are some places where the populations are so sparse that they're not creating enough CO_2 – North Dakota, Montana. Leave them alone."

The result of all this is that Kia is on "a consistent course to have two line-ups: internal combustion and fully electrified. They will sell at different rates in different parts of the country."

Center is something of a legend in the US industry, having overseen Honda's vast operations there for most of his career before switching to Kia two years ago. Record sales followed in 2023 - almost 750,000 - and in December the firm was on track to better that.

> **"It's very difficult to make long-term decisions"**

With a factory in Mexico providing around a fifth of Kia US's volume, it "depends what and how [Trump] wants to tariff" as to how exposed Kia is to imminent policy changes.

"But," says Center, "I'm a free-market person: the more you monkey with it, the more you create unintended consequences."

GETTY IMAGES

TESLA MODEL Y RAISES ITS GAME FOR 2025

Facelift targets gains in efficiency, refinement and quality

OFFICIAL PICTURES

The new 2025 Tesla Model Y has been officially revealed as sales of the updated electric crossover begin in China.

Codenamed Project Juniper and spotted testing in Europe earlier this month, the facelifted Model Y arrives as Tesla faces intense competition in all global markets.

Broadly, the upgrades match those made to the Tesla Model 3 last year and are focused around improving the Model Y's efficiency, refinement and quality.

The headline change for the world's best-selling electric car is its freshly redesigned exterior, which is differentiated from the current car by wraparound light bars at the front and rear and subtly reshaped bumpers.

The crossover's immense commercial success makes it Tesla's most important asset and the American EV maker will look to leverage it in an attempt to move out of a prolonged dip in sales.

Because the car had not been substantially updated in almost five years, it no longer offered a clear usability and performance advantage over its rivals.

At launch the Model Y's maximum 331-mile range was seen as a headline attribute but was eventually matched by cheaper rivals. Last year's new Long Range Rear-Wheel Drive variant, with 373 miles of range, plugged that gap but was still not enough to beat the Peugeot e-3008's 434 miles.

Only the Long Range All-Wheel Drive and Rear-Wheel Drive variants have been refreshed so far. They have claimed ranges of up to 447 and 368 miles per charge, respectively, according to China's very generous Light-Duty Vehicle Test Cycle. This is up 73 and 37 miles respectively on the outgoing Model Y, although these numbers are expected to fall when tested by Europe's WLTP.

The All-Wheel Drive variant is also now half a second quicker to 60mph than the car it replaces, dispatching the sprint in 4.3sec. In contrast, the single-motor variant is now 0.3sec slower, at 5.8sec. Peak charging speed remains at 250kW.

Tesla says the Model Y's new look has been conceived to "maximise efficiency, using every kilowatt-hour more effectively" and it claims the new suspension, wheels and tyres will help in this endeavour.

The car's drag coefficient (Cd) is said to have been reduced from 0.23 to 0.22, ensuring it remains one of the market's slipperiest cars. This should boost range and cut wind noise.

The revised Model Y is also 47mm longer than the current car, at 4797mm, but a scant 1mm narrower, at 1624mm wide.

Inside, the crossover follows its saloon sibling in being treated to a subtle refresh of its materials and technology, rather than a wide-reaching overhaul.

There is now a touchscreen in the rear, for example, and the back seats fold electrically to increase boot space. The front seats are now ventilated and can be upholstered in new fabrics that "make you relax as if you are floating in space", according to Tesla.

All of the main controls are hosted in a central, 15.4in touchscreen, which runs on updated software that is said to improve response and quality.

Full UK specifications are expected in the coming weeks. Initial deliveries begin in China at the end of February. Unlike the updated Model 3, whose price fell when it hit showrooms, the refreshed Model Y's starting price is expected to rise to just under £50,000, mirroring the increase seen in China.

FELIX PAGE

Bodywork changes help drop the Cd to 0.22; range has increased

TURBO LOOK FOR PUNCHIER CARRERA S

THE UPDATED PORSCHE 911 Carrera S has been revealed with a new look and a healthy power uplift.

Sitting between the Carrera T and the new GTS T-Hybrid, the '992.2' Carrera S is said to achieve performance levels formerly reserved for the previous Carrera GTS.

Power has risen to 473bhp from the same turbocharged 3.0-litre flat six, thanks to new turbochargers and an "extensively optimised" cooling system.

It can complete the 0-62mph sprint in 3.3sec – 0.4sec quicker than before – and tops out at 191mph.

The Carrera S has adopted some cues from the Turbo for a more aggressive look.

Pricing starts at £119,800 for the coupé and £129,800 for the soft-top convertible.

OFFICIAL PICTURE

Mid-range 911 now offers significantly more standard kit

MY WEEK IN CARS

Steve Cropley

Saab 99 narrowly beat VW Beetle to the top of Cropley's affections at Brooklands

SATURDAY, SUNDAY

Don't let anyone tell you life doesn't get better. In the old days, we had to wait months for interesting car events to start. This time, at least for us down south, there were two winners on the very first weekend. Saturday brought Brooklands' New Year's Day Classic Gathering (happily postponed for a few days due to a deluge), Sunday Bicester Heritage's first Scramble. Both were perfect relief from the confinement of Christmas, although quite different in character.

Brooklands was as amazing as ever for its scale and variety, joyously reminding us of cars we had forgotten existed. I amused myself by wandering about with a pal to spot unmolested classics. We especially liked a 1955 small-window VW Beetle (correct wheels and ride height – a rarity) and a truly beautiful 1978 Saab 99 GL 5dr with just 20,000 miles on the clock. It snowed overnight between Brooklands and Bicester, but people still brought interesting cars, especially tin-tops.

That inviting corner of Oxfordshire is special on any day for its permanent car community: the Polestar showroom, the Hagerty Clubhouse, the Hero-Era and Motorsport UK HQs, several vintage car dealerships and the Heritage Skills Academy.

Dacia's miniature EV will appeal to many despite its limitations

> **"The challenge turned out to be simplicity itself"**

MONDAY

It's great to be back in the office, hearing about my colleagues' multifarious seasonal motoring exploits; you will read more of those in the next week or two. Mind you, I reckon I trumped most of them by doing 450 miles in a left-hand-drive Renault 5 EV, whose cheeky beauty (and luminous green paint) created constant interest. It's so clear, when you drive a car like this that isn't yet on the market, what an aid to marketing a familiar shape and image will be to sales. To a person, everyone who showed interest already knew the car's identity and some of its story. Their concern, overwhelmingly, was whether it was fit to continue the Renault 5 story. I said yes.

TUESDAY

I'm writing this from a vacant salesman's desk in my local Renault dealership, Fish Bros of Swindon, who are servicing my 30,000-mile Dacia Duster. They delivered it two and a half years ago; it was a long-termer I couldn't bear to give back.

I enjoy taking my cars for service and waiting for them: you see all the showroom stock, plus the used stuff outside. I spent a few minutes here configuring my ideal Dacia Spring (an £18,500 65 Extreme, complete with £250 spare wheel). It looks an enticingly simple, almost Citroën 2CV-ish little car (Fish Bros reckon they're doing well with it), and for many the offered £180-per-month deal (after a £3500 deposit) must be cheaper than public transport. But where I live, any deal would hang on how close it can really get to the claimed 140-mile range. It might be closer to 100 miles in winter, I suspect – fine for many but not me.

WEDNESDAY

I'm surprised how happy I am to be reunited with the Genesis Electrified G80 I've been running for the past few months (see p57). Its brand of spacious, silent waftability is something that you only realise you miss when it's gone.

Over Christmas, it went to Belgium with road tester Illya Verpraet, who will soon be reporting on his experience. He tells me the anticipated challenge of driving a big EV to Europe in winter turned out to be simplicity itself, because of the closeness of the UK and Belgium; the G80's good range; and the ease of continental charging. On balance, he says, the UK's charger locations make more sense, because they're usually close to coffee shops and eateries. In Belgium, they're plentiful but remote.

AND ANOTHER THING

I'm conflicted. I keep seeing bargain-priced, immaculate Jaguar I-Paces (the cheapest below £20k) that might be wonderful bargains or money pits. I've heard both stories. I would love to hear the truth. If you know the answer, would you mind getting in touch? Owners, dealers and technicians are all welcome.

GET IN TOUCH
steve.cropley@haymarket.com

PRIOR CONVICTION

Matt Prior

It took two British advertising students writing directly to then Nike CEO Philip Knight to draw confirmation of how to pronounce the sports equipment brand's name properly.

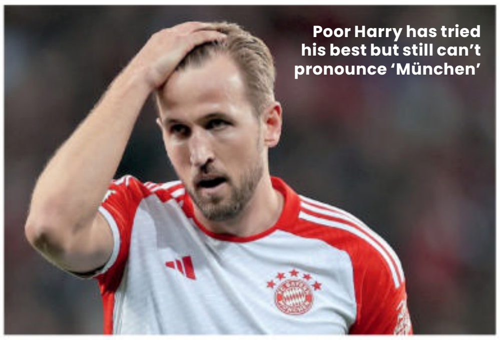
In 2014, 50 years after Knight and Bill Bowerman had founded Blue Ribbon Sports, which would in 1971 be renamed Nike (after the Greek god of victory), the students sent Knight a letter, along with a stamped and addressed return envelope. It contained just two paragraphs, asking Knight to simply circle the correct way to say the company's name: 'Nike' or 'Ni-ke'. It was reported at the time that they hadn't expected a reply but, a few weeks later, got their letter back. Knight had circled 'Ni-ke'.

As far as I can tell, this is the only time that Nike has been drawn into the pronunciation game. Searches on the wider web and Nike's own pages for tips or official statements draw a blank. The short of it is that it's possible to build one of the world's 10 most recognisable brands, a company that takes in $50 billion a year and employs 80,000 people while simultaneously not worrying that in some countries people will pronounce its name incorrectly.

And so, reader, to Hyundai, which, if you're a regular radio listener, you will have heard advising an actor, and by association you, on how to say its name right.

Like Hyacinth Bucket answering the phone with a highfalutin 'The Bouquet residence', it's not 'High-oond-aye', it's 'He-oon-day', the advert says. There's only a little attention given to the 'y', as the first two syllables are slurred towards one.

Hyundai says it would like to be called the same thing, correctly, worldwide. Although if you go to the US, residents don't usually mention the 'y' at all, making it a two-syllable 'Hunday' – a situation about which, in Nike fashion, nobody seems to mind.



Poor Harry has tried his best but still can't pronounce 'München'

Not like they seem to in the UK, anyway, as the ad pushes its glasses up its nose and begins 'akshually…' before embarking on the correction and, here's the thing, telling the listener precious little about any of its cars as it does so.

What luxury to be able to launch a Jaguar-lite advert intent on telling one who the company is rather than trying to actually sell them something it makes.

Why is Hyundai doing this? Why does it so borderline passive-aggressively care how one pronounces its name and why does it remotely think we care what it's called?

I mean, look, I'm expected to get its name right, because it's part of my gig. But as for the general consumer, as Mark Ritson wrote in Marketing Week: "Understanding the utter lack of importance a brand plays in the life of its customers is the beginning of better brand management."

> **"Why does Hyundai remotely think we care what it's called?"**

Advertising agency DDB's Sarah Carter once put it more bluntly still. Marketers "should have Post-it notes on their desks saying: 'Consumers don't give a shit. People's indifference to brands and advertising should be the starting point,'" she said.

We have bills to pay. Work to go to. Children to take places. Parents who need care. Fun to have. Food to cook. Places to be. Illnesses to put right. We have *lives*. What significance do you think I allot to how a faceless corporation pronounces its name? I have some milk going out of date tomorrow. In terms of how much I care, it's way, way below that.

The fact is, people in different places might pronounce things differently. If that's a person's name, sensitivity says we should try to get it right. If it's a brand, shrug emoji.

Besides, it's complicated. Technically Skoda is Shkoda, Porsche is Porscher and Ikea is Ekaya. The chances of me saying those right depend not just on me knowing and remembering but also whether it makes me sound like a divot. And even FC Bayern München, a sports team rather than a corporation, knows to call itself 'Bayern Munich' internationally, rather than harrumphing about why the English translate 'München' but not, say, 'Napoli'.

Nike apparently thinks, as the cliché and sometime song lyric goes, 'I don't care what you call me, so long as you call me'.

Quite right, too. I will call you what I want. Sell me a car.

GET IN TOUCH
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Hyundai's new Ioniq EVs deserve to be under the advertising spotlight

GETTY IMAGES

RACING LINES

Damien Smith

Alan Mann's eponymous team found success and fame with Fords in the '60s

"Historic motorsport is the future", apparently. As back to front as that sounds, I understood the sentiment when an event organiser recently said as much. 'Retro' pulls us back like gravity the further we travel from the rose-tinted familiarity of our old world. Look at the size, scope and popularity of the UK's classic 'majors' at Goodwood and the Silverstone Festival. The comfort blanket of the past has never appeared more snug.

Henry Mann is one of many specialists who make their living from yesteryear. Son of the late, great 1960s entrant Alan Mann, he grew up surrounded by beguiling old metal – painted in flame red with a gold stripe. Mann Sr emerged as a key figure 60 years ago, via Ford Cortinas, Mustangs and Escorts and played a vital role in Dearborn's GT40 success story before focusing on aviation during the 1970s. The boom in nostalgia triggered largely by Goodwood led him back to racing. And since Alan's death in 2012, Henry has been maintaining the family tradition.

"Dad only ran his team for seven years; we've been going longer since he died," he says. But as he then relates, the glorious sheen takes some polishing. The gritty reality on the frontline of motorsport nostalgia isn't as spotless or as lucrative as it might seem.

WHY RACING ISN'T ENOUGH

That's why Mann is delighted – and somewhat relieved – that Alan Mann Racing (AMR) is now a part of Boreham Motorworks, a Ford-blessed project from the flowering DRVN Automotive Group, serving as an in-house high-performance division. The move offers AMR the security and stability that running old racing cars for wealthy owners simply couldn't.

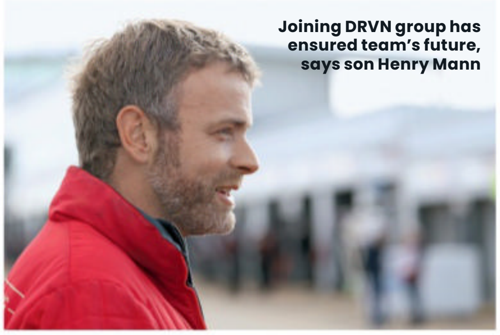
"Historic racing is not really a viable business any more"

While AMR will continue to race, Mann will now also help curate events for the Boreham High Performance Club, and he can't wait to get his hands on the 'continumod' Escort RS Mk1 announced recently (News, 18/25 December 2024). Ahead of the 150-unit production run, he will play a key part in the new-old Escort's development – a pleasing parallel to his old man's role as Ford's fabled 'secret weapon' 60 years ago.

"It was a timely intervention," admits Mann. "Historic racing is not what it was at our level. Maybe in the upper echelons it has been insulated and is still thriving, but customers don't do the testing and smaller meetings at Snetterton, Castle Combe and so on that they used to. Once a car is built, there's less service activity. People are more selective and the historic race car market is slipping. Ferraris and F1 cars are fine, but I'm talking about Mustangs, Cortinas and so on. Cars on the market are not really moving and people are taking the prices down."

This might be news to Goodwood patrons.

"Brexit, Covid, the economic situation, the cost of materials: everything has been going in the wrong direction and historic racing is not really a viable business model any more," insists Mann. It's the lifeblood of the team and what we all love, but we needed another strand."



Joining DRVN group has ensured team's future, says son Henry Mann

"What DRVN has put together is extraordinary," he continues. "There's an appetite to build these cars and to buy them."

Yes, even at an eye-watering price – for an Escort – of £295,000.

ALL WITH FORD'S BLESSING

Mann's role with the Boreham continumod is "to make them the rewarding car a Mk1 Escort can be", he says. "This should be the best Mk1 Escort that has ever been built. The spec, attention to detail and engineering is the stuff Dad could only have dreamed of in 1968."

"I'm looking forward to driving it," adds Mann. "Escorts slide progressively, and that's the thing modern high-performance cars can't deliver – the ones I've driven, at least."

Details will follow on venues and dates for club events, but Mann offers a taster: "These cars are probably going to give their best when running on the track, rather than the road. The ethos is where like-minded people can come together, bring their beautiful new toys and have a track experience that's memorable in a good location, with some coaching and tuition if needed."

And the high price? "If you started a home build restoration of an Escort RS, got it straight and rust-free, put a decent engine in and a roll-cage, without this level of engineering or Ford licensing or a warranty, you would be up at a similar number. I don't think it will alienate the Ford community."

Other past greats, including the RS200 Group B rally car, are set for the same treatment – all with Ford's backing, crucially. Proof that despite the blasphemy of an electric SUV called Capri, someone in Michigan hasn't forgotten the past. Then again, why would they? History is too good for business. But if the plunder allows a past great such as AMR to breathe new life, we're not about to argue.

YOUR VIEWS

WRITE TO autocar@haymarket.com

Letter of the week

TOXIC GAS

Those of us who use LPG in the UK are really trying to get the press to do some digging into the practices of Motor Fuel Group (MFG). This company is trying to do away with LPG on its forecourts, and it has been buying up a lot of them (to the point where many of us actually feel that the monopolies commission should be looking at them).

Recently overnight, all MFG forecourts put LPG up to pretty much the same price as petrol, making it utterly pointless to use LPG. I think the amount of protests they received made them reduce the price, but it hasn't been by much. Independent LPG suppliers are still charging 80-90p per litre, but Morrisons supermarket forecourts – all 337 of which were acquired by MFG last April – are still up at around £1.10.

It seems to me that MFG is attempting to be able to say 'hey, look, people have stopped using LPG' so that it can remove the pumps from its forecourts and replace them with EV chargers.

Mark Davies
Via email

MFG didn't respond to Autocar's request for comment, but it told the Competition and Markets Authority in 2022: "LPG is no longer an important product category for modern petrol station forecourt businesses, due to a continued industry-wide decrease in demand. Accordingly, MFG plans to remove auto-LPG from all of its sites between 2022 and 2024."

SCRAPING THE BARREL

In your final report on your long-term Skoda Kamiq (31 December 2024), mention was made of the many thoughtful features the car has. However, a feature that I was very disappointed to see was the position of the handbrake, which is clearly set up for left-hand drive. You seemingly didn't even notice this. If I were buying this car, I would prefer Skoda to put the handbrake where it should be, rather than giving me an ice scraper.

Thomas Farrelly
Via email

MONKEY ON TESLA'S BACK

I feel we're reaching a point where Tesla must distance itself from its CEO Elon Musk.

A few years ago, Musk was taken to court by a group of Tesla shareholders who alleged that he had misled them by tweeting that he had secured funding to take Tesla back into private ownership. He was eventually cleared of any wrongdoing, and it seems to me that this planted within him a seed of belief that he could basically get away with saying whatever he wanted. He seems to have no sense of repercussions for others.

His recent dip into the political pool is increasingly controversial, and with every incendiary political statement he posts on X, his position at Tesla becomes less tenable. In the past few weeks, he has hit out disgracefully at government leaders in the UK, France and Germany, spreading dangerous disinformation – all while being touted as part of the incoming US government!

If I had any desire to be a Tesla shareholder, I would take a second look at my assets for the long term. No government can be interested in hosting any Tesla infrastructure for fear of Musk's maniacal stream of consciousness if they dare to defy his ideologies. Tesla's growth will surely stunt. Surely the board feels similarly. How much further are they willing to watch him go?

G Dykes
Via email

For the record, Musk has described Keir Starmer as "evil" and called for the prime minister to be imprisoned. What chance of that long-mooted UK Tesla factory now? – KC

ELECTRICAL OVERLOAD

In testing the new Mercedes-Benz E450d (UK verdicts, 8 January), you commented that it was "out of step with the times", due to it not running on electricity.

I think it is in fact you who are out of step with the times. Private buyers are simply not interested in EVs. This is evident by only one in 10 private buyers opting for an EV and, despite heavily manipulative sales tactics, many manufacturers still missing the government's arbitrary zero-emission vehicle mandate targets.

Car enthusiasts, not random consumers, tend to buy the majority of car magazines. Your issues lately have contained what appears to be mostly EV content. Car enthusiasts are not interested in white goods; if they were, they would read a tech magazine.

Simon Bransby
Via email

We can only report on what the car industry is introducing at present and planning for the future and, like it or not, increasingly that is EVs – KC

We'll happily test more straight-six diesels – if car firms make 'em

Is Musk a help or a hindrance to Tesla?

If only Ford could have made this car electric…

EXTREMELY PLEASED

My new Dacia Duster Hybrid Extreme – the top-spec model with heated seats and steering wheel etc – cost me only £23,000. Okay, being in Guernsey, I didn't have to pay VAT, but it's still only £27,000 on mainland UK.

I'm loving it so far: it's getting about 55-60mpg and it's smooth and refined; it certainly seems quieter than the Renault Clio E-Tech with the same hybrid powertrain.

I just need to stop looking at a bright yellow new Renault 5 EV. Please stop recommending it!

Martin Gaudion
Guernsey

GETTY IMAGES

STILL UNBEATEN

In your 31 December 2024 issue, you reported that the new Ford Mustang GTD (the fastest Mustang, 815bhp, list price around £315,000) had lapped the Nürburgring in 6min 57sec, more than 2.2sec quicker than Porsche's 911 GT3 (the third-fastest 911, 503bhp, £157,000).

This overlooks the fact that, seven years ago, Porsche's then fastest 911, the GT2 RS (more than 100bhp less and £100,000 cheaper than the GTD) was 10 seconds faster around the 'Ring, and that two years ago, Porsche's then second-fastest 911, the GT3 RS (nearly 300bhp less and more than £100,000 cheaper than the GTD) was nearly 10 seconds faster around the 'Ring.

Seán mac Cann
Trillick, County Tyrone

LOST THEIR FOCUS

How can a company with so much technical ability as Ford have got its strategy for the transition from ICE to electric vehicles so wrong?

The last-generation Fiesta was a masterclass in how to build an accessible, affordable and practical small car with outstanding driving dynamics. I had a Fiesta in my formative motoring years and despite owning multiple Audis and BMWs since can say it was one of my favourite-ever cars. I recall it being described in a Autocar road test as the car BMW would have been proud of if it had made small cars.

Yet Ford has ploughed resources into expensive, battery-powered SUVs, such as the Capri, that are priced to compete in the semi-premium sector.

The public perception of Ford as a premium manufacturer in the UK has never held much water. Wouldn't it have been much better to build on the success of the Fiesta and develop a small electric vehicle for the masses? Renault has proven that this is possible with the warmly received 5 E-Tech.

Instead, Ford finds itself in a perilous situation with the prospect of factory closures and an uncertain future. Let's hope that a once world-leading automotive giant can once again find its mojo.

Mike Wells
Via email

Brilliant though the Fiesta was, it was unprofitable – and, as then Ford of Europe boss Martin Sander told Autocar in 2023, "at the end of the day, we're a business; we have to make sure that we make money" – KC

Weekly winner

Letter of the week wins this ValetPro exterior protection and maintenance kit worth £48

GREAT REASONS TO BUY

Next week's issue

ON SALE 22 JANUARY

FEATURE

GORDON MURRAY AUTOMOTIVE

We meet the brains behind Surrey's precocious hypercar company – and ride with a motorsport legend in its mighty, V12-engined T50

FIRST DRIVE

LAND ROVER DEFENDER OCTA

With a 626bhp V8 and four-wheel drive, can the new range-topping Defender manage to be both a supercar slayer and an epic off-roader?

ROAD TEST

PORSCHE PANAMERA 4 E-HYBRID

New-generation V6-engined GT faces the industry's toughest test

EVERY WEEK

LIVING WITH A...

ALFA ROMEO GIULIA QV

Italian V6 super-saloon was wild – and not always in a good way...

USED GUIDE

PEUGEOT 208

Bag a talented, modern small hatch for only £800. Yes, really

CONTENTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

AUTOCAR

The original car magazine, published since 1895 'in the interests of the mechanically propelled road carriage'

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Circulation enquiries: Frontline Ltd, 1st Floor, Stuart House, St John's Street, Peterborough, PE1 5DD (01733 555161). Printed by William Gibbons, Wolverhampton. Registered as a newspaper with the Royal Mail. Member of the ABC. ISSN 1355-8293.

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HOW WE TEST CARS

Autocar delivers several kinds of reviews on new cars, with different levels of technical and functional scrutiny. As the name suggests, our First Drives section typically addresses cars that we're driving for the first time - either in final production form or as late prototypes. Time in the car can be limited here, technical and equipment specification might not be finalised and some systems software may not be to production specification. For those reasons, First Drive reports don't have star ratings.

Once we have driven a car for a second time in the UK, in right-hand-drive form and typically at greater length, we will rate it, either as part of a shorter UK test report or as the subject of a full, instrumented Road Test.

In the latter case, we take empirical performance and refinement benchmarks from it at Horiba MIRA proving ground, as well as subjective limit handling impressions, plus key measurements of practicality, efficiency and kerb weight.

All UK tests and Road Tests receive proper verdicts with star ratings informed by everything we have learned and the combined impressions and experience of several testers.

FIRST DRIVES

TESTED 25.9.24, NORTH JUTLAND, DENMARK **DELIVERIES** SUMMER

ALFA ROMEO JUNIOR IBRIDA

Electric baby crossover is followed by a 134bhp hybrid

It was bound to happen once Alfa Romeo got folded into the Stellantis family: no more super-expensive, bespoke, rear-wheel-drive platforms like the one that it developed for the Giulia and Stelvio. Now the brand's job is to take the same bones as Citroën, Vauxhall, Jeep, DS et al and somehow make something with them that feels like a true Alfa. A tough job.

Enter the Alfa Junior. Small crossovers are what the people are buying, and small crossovers are what they will get. Underneath, it's the same car as the Peugeot 2008, Jeep Avenger, Fiat 600 and a few others, but Alfa makes much of its sporty character, talking of "symbiosis" and "authentic emotions".

We've previously driven a few Elettrica (that's Italian for electric) versions, and in Veloce form, with 276bhp, a limited-slip differential and Sabelt bucket seats, it showed promise. But Alfa is aware that for many people an EV doesn't work, so in the middle of this year it will also introduce a petrol version, the Ibrida (that's Italian for hybrid).

It's powered by the same combination of a 134bhp 1.2-litre three-cylinder turbocharged petrol engine with a small battery and a 28bhp electric motor that's offered in everything from the Vauxhall Corsa to the seven-seat Peugeot 5008. We know it as reasonably economical, particularly if you do a lot of suburban pottering, wherein the engine can switch off and hand over to the motor. It's

Firm suspension makes it more agile than siblings but less comfortable too

Meshed grille is standard; Speciale models get this optional closed version

TESTER'S NOTE

One way to liven up the interior is to add the Sabelt bucket seats. They're complete overkill for a 134bhp crossover and very expensive, but fair play to Alfa for offering them (in Europe, at least). **IV**

> **"Fun? Not exactly. For that, it lacks sharpness and adjustability"**

It's essentially a Fiat 600 interior with some Alfa design cues attached

no different here, but all this does beg the question of whether these relatively prosaic building blocks can add up to something worthy of a cloverleaf badge.

The answer depends on your point of view. If you're after the kind of desirable, premium driver's car that we like to see from Alfa, the Junior Ibrida simply isn't it. It feels too ordinary for that. Not bad, just a bit ordinary.

The interior in particular is a disappointment. There's a nod to Alfa's heritage with a double cowl over the instrument cluster, but it just covers a rectangular screen. The door cards are exactly the same as in the Avenger and feel just as cheap, as does the dashboard. All the switchgear is standard-issue Stellantis stuff that doesn't feel especially upmarket. The infotainment in particular is starting to lag behind rivals' for responsiveness and ease of use. The Junior has the same long-arm, short-leg driving position as its CMP-based relatives, while rear leg room is very limited. And at 415 litres, its boot space is smaller than the Ford Puma's or Skoda Kamiq's.

There's enough poke to propel this 1305kg car swiftly enough. As in others with this powertrain, the performance is there but needs to be coaxed out to some extent. In auto mode, the six-speed dual-clutch automatic gearbox can be quite slow and overly keen to keep the revs low, making the engine lethargic and emphasising its rattly nature. Take control with manual mode and it revs out quite happily, making a moderately sporting noise. But I wonder how many people will actually do that.

Handling-wise, all of the CMP-based cars are quietly decent, and this Junior is no different. There's a good amount of grip and turn-in immediacy and the steering has a bit more meat to it than, say, the 2008's. Fun? Not exactly. For that, it lacks sharpness and adjustability. The ride quality is pretty tough, too.

Perhaps it's unfair to judge the Junior against the Alfas we love, though. Really, when you look at the pricing and what it is up against, it's a rival for the Puma, Seat Arona and Lexus LBX, and maybe the five-door Mini Cooper if SUV flavour isn't a priority.

Pricing and trim structure for the UK haven't been announced yet, but in Belgium, for example, it costs the equivalent of £23,500, or £26,000 in Speciale form. That's in line with those rivals. I wouldn't be surprised if only the Speciale comes here anyway, since British buyers tend to have little interest in the cheapest trims.

Judged simply as a small crossover or hatchback, the Junior is a decent option, even if it isn't as rounded as the Puma or as upmarket as the Cooper or LBX.

Whether that's the sort of thing Alfa should be doing is a different matter, and in light of just how many similarly sized cars exist within the Stellantis family and elsewhere, I can't help feeling that Alfa has missed an opportunity to make the Junior into a really premium, fun-to-drive option.

ILLYA VERPRAET

TECH SPEC

ALFA ROMEO JUNIOR IBRIDA SPECIALE

At the sportier end of the class. Decent to drive and should be economical but far from perfect and might struggle to stand out

Price £26,000 (est)
Engine 3 cyls in line, 1199cc, turbocharged, petrol, plus electric motor and ISG
Power 134bhp at 5500rpm
Torque 170lb ft at 1750rpm
Gearbox 6-spd dual-clutch automatic, FWD
Kerb weight 1305kg
0-62mph 8.9sec
Top speed 128mph
Economy 54.3-57.6mpg
CO_2, tax band 110-117g/km, 27-28%
Rivals Ford Puma, Lexus LBX, Seat Arona, Peugeot 2008

TESTED 8.1.25, HAMPSHIRE **DELIVERIES** NOW

FORD MUSTANG MACH-E RALLY

Dirt-road fun for a minimal extra outlay is the promise. Does it deliver?

Say what you will about Ford (and following the launch of the Capri and axing of the Fiesta, plenty have) but it's still a company with a sense of humour. How else do you explain it still offering a V8 Mustang, a Ranger Raptor and now this: the Mustang Mach-E Rally?

You could think of it as Ford's take on the Porsche 911 Dakar or Lamborghini Huracán Sterrato. For some rough-road capability, the Mach-E has been given a range of rally-themed addenda. It's based on the GT – the 480bhp, dual-motor high-performance version – but it has been given a 20mm suspension lift with reprogrammed magnetorheological dampers.

They're joined by white rally-style wheels that are an inch smaller than the ones on the GT to give a taller sidewall on the all-season tyres. Skidplates protect the front and rear motors and there's a Rally Sport drive mode that relaxes the stability control and makes the accelerator response more linear so that it's easier to slide the car on loose surfaces. Ford has given the Rally some cosmetic touches as well, such as the Focus RS-inspired spoiler, the striping pack and gloss white accents in the interior.

Of course, the Mach-E Rally is not as serious as those £200,000

Rally gains a raised ride height, taller tyres and a Focus RS-style spoiler

ruggedised supercars but it's not meant to be. Instead, it's a fun way to jazz up an electric SUV. In fact, it's sold in the UK simply as a £2250 option pack on the GT.

The problem with the off-road sports car idea is that finding public dirt roads is not easy in most of England, so just as important as the Rally's performance off road is what it does on it, so let's start with that.

The Mach-E GT always suffered from a restless ride with lots of bump-thump. Although softer suspension with more travel and taller sidewalls on the less performance-oriented tyres haven't entirely eradicated the problem – there's still an ever-present background rumble that you hear as much as feel – the changes have tempered it to an acceptable level for a performance car.

As with the normal GT, the Rally is extremely keen to rotate into and out of a corner, particularly when the roads are as cold and greasy as they were during our test. It's certainly amusing, and the new Rally Sport mode does seem to make the car's responses a little more linear, but it's still flawed as a driver's car. The brake pedal has a lot of dead travel and then grabs quite suddenly. The steering is weird too: in the more sedate modes it's extremely light, while in Untamed mode it becomes quite heavy and gets that Ford-typical elasticated feeling but no more actual feedback to speak of.

The Ioniq 5 N has simply moved the game on for fun EVs. It has better body control and more options to make it do what you want it to. But you wouldn't want to take the Hyundai off the Tarmac, which is something you can (and should) do with the Ford. It is unfazed by a bit of light fording and mud-plugging, and really comes alive on a loose surface. It can be made to slide very easily and feels essentially rear-wheel drive.

While a single-motor Mach-E would probably do big drifts as well, the Rally very cleverly blends in some front-wheel drive to stabilise the slide initially and to start pulling you out when it senses you want to straighten up. There's still a sense of the software second-guessing you sometimes, but it's less noticeable than when we drove the normal GT on a wet track.

Whether this capability is of much use to you will depend on where you live, of course. If you drive exclusively on the road, the Ioniq 5 N is easily the better performance EV. It's £11,790 cheaper and the Mach-E in general is feeling its age, particularly as an EV. It has a very large battery, at 91kWh (usable capacity), but it averaged only 2.4mpkWh in normal driving on our test. Granted, temperatures were near freezing, but the Genesis G80 I drove on the same day managed 3.4mpkWh. An average of 2.4mpkWh gives the Ford a range of only 218 miles, and it charges at just 150kW (and well below that most of the time).

Ford didn't really have to make the Rally, but I'm glad it has because it brings some colour and niche interest to what could be an otherwise boring class of cars. It goes back to that sense of humour: this is a relatively low-risk thing for Ford to do, but it's a nice halo car and it's fun. As with the Dakar and Sterrato versions of the 911 and Huracán, the changes make a better road car and enable you to go play in the dirt or the snow if you want to.

ILLYA VERPRAET

> **"The Rally is extremely keen to rotate into and out of a corner, especially on greasy roads"**

TESTER'S NOTE

Our test car had BlueCruise, Ford's hands-off cruise control. Rather than a revolutionary semi-autonomous system, it just feels like an adaptive cruise control system that's quite clever in its distancing and lane positioning. But it doesn't change lanes by itself and I'm not sure what else I'd do with my hands while driving. **IV**

Revised suspension and software settings make sliding it easier and fun

Large touchscreen dominates the cabin, as with the regular model

TECH SPEC

FORD MUSTANG MACH-E RALLY

Brings just a hint of Ariel Nomad to the electric SUV market. It's unique and all the better for it, but the base car feels a generation behind

★★★☆☆

Price £76,790
Engine Two permanent magnet synchronous motors
Power 480bhp
Torque 634lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, 4WD
Kerb weight 2343kg
0-62mph 3.6sec
Top speed 124mph
Battery 99.0/91.0kWh (total/usable)
Range, economy 316 miles, 2.9mpkWh
CO2, tax band 0g/km, 2%
Rivals Ariel Nomad, Hyundai Ioniq 5 N

TESTER'S NOTE
The need to accommodate a 24.8kWh battery means this GLC's 470-litre boot is 150 litres down on that of a pure-ICE version. **JD**

TESTED 2.12.24, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE **DELIVERIES** NOW

MERCEDES-BENZ GLC 300DE

Does a plug-in hybrid make even more sense when it's diesel-engined?

To the surprise of nobody, Mercedes' medium-size SUV has been one of its best-sellers ever since its 2016 launch. Part of the GLC's success is down to its wide variety of hybrid powertrains, from mild to plug-in – and intriguingly, this uniquely includes a diesel PHEV, the 300de, which we're belatedly driving for the first time here.

This combination of compression ignition and electricity seems a slightly confused offering. On the one hand, it's a heavily electrified PHEV with an official electric range of up to 78 miles, which makes it very tempting for company car drivers. On the other hand, it's that four-wheeled bete noire, a diesel.

However, you could argue that it really does represent the best of both worlds. For most of your daily chores, it runs in smooth, efficient, zero-emissions EV mode. When you want to go farther, no powertrain offers such excellent long-distance efficiency as a diesel. So, does the theory work in practice?

When mooching about, there's no denying the GLC delivers a suitably sybaritic vibe that's fully in keeping with a machine that, in standard guise at least, has never pretended to be anything other than an easy-going pseudo-mud-plugger with upmarket trappings.

The 134bhp electric motor has just enough urge for you to keep up with the flow of traffic and will keep going all the way to 87mph, meaning in most daily driving engagements you will rarely bother the 2.0-litre oil-burner.

When the 195bhp four does fire into life, it provides impressive mid-range muscle and good refinement, provided you don't visit the redline, where it becomes rather strident – although if your ears can stand it, the result is a hot hatch-baiting 0-62mph time of 6.4sec.

Overall, the integration of internal combustion and electric power is seamless, too. Only when you ask for maximum acceleration in a hurry does the system become a little discombobulated, the nine-speed automatic gearbox, engine and motor jerkily tripping over each other as it struggles to decide who should go first.

The rest of the driving experience is standard GLC, which means a capable but not captivating display. A lack of feedback through the steering wheel disguises a quick and accurate rack, and it corners with neat composure, despite its high-riding stance. The subtly rear-biased four-wheel drive system also helps to add a sense of agility, even though you're always aware of the car's 2385kg kerb weight.

The 300de is at its best when you take it easy, however: its impressive noise isolation and even-keeled ride make for relaxing progress.

This is a feeling enhanced by the GLC's slickly designed interior, which makes up for in style and fairly intuitive technology what it lacks in ultimate solidity. Like in most modern Mercs, cost-cutting means the quality is creakily skin deep in some areas of the cabin.

So, what's the catch? Well, for fleet users, there isn't one. The 300de's heavy electrification means it's rated at just 5% for benefit-in-kind (BIK) tax, so you will be taxed some £3000 a year less than for the less powerful 220d diesel.

The problem is that the petrol-engined 300e PHEV also incurs 5% BIK tax yet has a lower list price and so makes an even smaller dent in your salary. Moreover, its turbo four provides just as much performance and in real-world terms is only fractionally less efficient. Which rather leaves the 300de in an automotive no-man's land.

JAMES DISDALE

Vast touchscreen might seem intimidating but is easy to get to grips with

TECH SPEC

MERCEDES-BENZ GLC 300DE 4MATIC URBAN EDITION

Offers outstanding electric range and low company car costs, but so does the dynamically identical yet cheaper petrol version

★★★☆☆

Price £61,110
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1993cc, turbocharged, diesel, plus electric motor
Power 328bhp at 3600rpm
Torque 550lb ft at 1800-2800rpm
Gearbox 9-spd automatic, FWD
Kerb weight 2385kg
0-62mph 6.4sec
Top speed 135mph
Battery 24.8kWh (usable)
Economy 565mpg
Electric range 71-78 miles
CO_2, tax band 11g/km, 5%
Rivals BMW X3, Land Rover Discovery Sport

TESTED 6.1.25, MIDDLESEX **DELIVERIES** NOW

SUZUKI VITARA

Firm tries to keep mini 4x4 competitive as it approaches a decade on sale

It's comfortable but needs better sound-deadening measures

An array of hard, grey plastics creates a dreary vibe inside

It's that time of year when four-wheel drive would seem a sensible addition to any new car. Right now, you would probably add it to the bedraggled old slippers that you wear to put the bins out, if you could. When it comes to the very smallest, supermini-based SUVs, however, it's still only about a 50/50 shot to be even available, with as many manufacturers reckoning buyers prefer a lighter, simpler and more efficient front-wheel-drive car to a 4WD one whose marginal capabilities may seldom be needed.

Brands with some proper 4x4 equity can still be relied on to offer it, though. In the case of the Vitara, which Suzuki has just lightly updated, you can actually get Allgrip with either engine, meaning there's a three-pedal, turbocharged 1.4-litre mild-hybrid 4x4 as well as a two-pedal, 1.5-litre, full-hybrid 4x4, both using an electronically controlled viscous coupling to route torque to the rear axle 'on demand'.

The update has brought a new radiator grille and front bumper design that's a little less fussy-looking and an extended roof spoiler with lateral extensions for a cleaner drag coefficient.

That contributes to running efficiency improvements valued by the WLTP lab test to be worth between 6% and 9%. They're not quite enough to put the Vitara among the B-SUV segment's most lean-running options, but if you're happy with only FWD, the full-hybrid automatic ought to be the marginally more frugal bet.

Interestingly, though, if you're buying an Allgrip model, it's the mild-hybrid manual (which we're testing here) that's rated as the more efficient of the two (and indeed, over a week with us, it averaged just under 50mpg).

Styling apart, cabin and active safety technology are what have been changed the most here.

The Vitara now features a 9.0in touchscreen system with wireless smartphone mirroring and some networked functionality. It doesn't look like the most sophisticated system, nor does it respond like one, tending to hide functions several layers deep on menu screens that need scrolling up and down. There are some top-layer navigation shortcuts, though – just enough, probably, in light of the fact that you would certainly default to your phone's mirrored software.

Elsewhere around the fascia, there's lots of permanent switchgear and proper physical heater controls, giving it an antiquated if likeably functional vibe.

Suzuki has also added certain now-mandatory ADAS: driver attention monitoring, lane departure warning, lane keeping assistance and intelligent speed control. In addition, the automatic emergency braking (AEB) system now works through a combination of camera and radar, so it can detect pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists as well as other cars.

We drove the Vitara in quite severe wintry weather in which the AEB and adaptive cruise control couldn't function. But it was the new speed control buzzer that caused the most consternation, because it's so hard to disable (an obscure 'long press' of one of the trip computer needles is the trick, but it took several days and a read of the handbook for us to know it).

On the road, the Vitara has a willing and usefully torquey turbocharged engine. It rides with a little bit of tin-box noise and vibration, but it's supple and comfortable enough and handles and performs quite well for something of its size and brief.

There are one or two hints of cheapness about various aspects of the Vitara's character, though, and of slight hoariness about others, that might lead you to question the value it offers compared with newer rivals.

MATT SAUNDERS

TECH SPEC

SUZUKI VITARA 1.4 BOOSTERJET MILD HYBRID ALLGRIP ULTRA

Still a likeable and hard-witted small SUV but now looking a bit expensive and long in the tooth

★★★☆☆

Price £30,449
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1373cc, turbocharged, petrol, plus ISG
Power 127bhp at 5500rpm
Torque 173lb ft at 2000-3000rpm
Gearbox 6-spd manual, 4WD
Kerb weight 1290kg
0-62mph 10.2sec
Top speed 121mph
Economy 52.3mpg
CO_2, tax band 128g/km, 30%
Rivals Dacia Duster 1.2 TCe 130 4x4, Jeep Avenger e-Hybrid, Subaru Crosstrek e-Boxer

TESTER'S NOTE

When this Vitara arrived in 2015, it had more two-tone paint schemes and a bit more ambition towards desirability. It's a shame to see that come to nought: with the Jimny no longer on sale here, Suzuki could do with a new poster boy. **MS**

ROAD TESTS

AUTOCAR ROAD TEST 5717

AUDI S5

S4 gets a new name – and potentially a greater focus on driver rewards

MODEL TESTED
AUDI S5 SALOON LAUNCH EDITION
Price £69,455 (Edition 1)
Power 362bhp at 5500-6300rpm
Torque 406lb ft at 1700-4000rpm
0-60mph 4.1sec
30-70mph 3.8sec
Top speed 155mph (claimed)
Average economy 27.4mpg
Electric range na
CO_2 emissions 176g/km
70-0mph 46.6m (10deg C, damp)

When we road tested the Audi Q6 E-tron, Ingolstadt's all-new electric SUV, it appeared to be a product of a new, different kind of Audi. One that stepped up its game in terms of driving dynamics, but took the rock-solid interior quality that has long typified the brand and traded it for a ruthlessly modern, screen-heavy approach.

Audi is on a launch blitz at the moment and just months after the Q6 come the new A5 and its sporty derivative, the S5. In a sense, the A5 and Q6 are polar opposites within the Audi line-up, because it doesn't get much more traditional than a compact exec with a range of petrol and diesel engines.

So was the somewhat un-Audi Q6 a one-off, riding on the coat-tails of its Porsche Macan sibling model, or has Audi really turned a corner?

A road test will reveal all, and we've gone straight for the S5, with its 362bhp hybridised V6 and four-wheel drive.

DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★★☆

PROS Subtly elegant design; wide range of powertrains, including this V6; interesting use of electrification
CONS Heavy; lack of spec choice for the S5 in the UK

In case you had somehow missed the news after Audi's recent barrage of new model launches, it has shaken up its naming convention. EVs now get even numbers, while piston cars get odd numbers. In other words, what used to be known as the A4 is now the A5. Later this year, Audi will launch a similarly sized EV that will carry on the A4 name. Meanwhile, the old A5 Coupé and Convertible are being discontinued. The new A5 Saloon simultaneously also replaces the old A5 Sportback, because instead of a traditional bootlid, the new one has a hatchback.

There's no doubt the new A5 carries on where the A4, and the Audi 80 before it, left off. As such, the new car is codenamed B10, following on from the B9 A4. Although the headline investments are going towards the EVs, this new A5 is much more than just a warmed-over B9.

The platform is a development of the previous generation's MLB, but it has been renamed Premium Platform Combustion (PPC) to mirror the EVs' Premium Platform Electric (PPE). The big job has been to ready it for varying degrees of electrification, from none at all in the entry-level A5s to a pair of plug-in hybrids with an EV range of more than 70 miles.

S2 started line of sporty compact Audis

This S5 sits somewhere in the middle, with its MHEV Plus system. The S5 abandons the diesel power that it adopted midway through the previous generation and goes back to a petrol V6. The EA839, here in 3.0-litre form, is a fundamentally familiar engine, also appearing in the Porsche Panamera and the old petrol S4 and S5. However, here it swaps a twin-scroll turbo for a variable-geometry one that provides more low-down torque.

Further aiding this is the 48V hybrid system, which consists of the usual starter-generator as well as a separate motor-generator that sits between the output of the gearbox and the propshaft. It has 24bhp and 170lb ft, can regen up to 25kW and is capable of driving the car by itself. The air-con also runs off the 48V system rather than the engine. The 48V battery is quite big, at 1.7kWh, and uses water cooling and lithium-iron-phosphate chemistry in order to stand up to frequent deep cycling.

All of this additional low-rev torque has allowed Audi to move to a seven-speed dual-clutch automatic gearbox instead of the old eight-speed torque converter, since the engine no longer needs the capacity for torque multiplication that a torque converter gives. It says the dual-clutch automatic is also more efficient at high revs.

On the chassis side, there have been a number of changes compared with the previous generation. The engineers say the focus has been on steering feel and a neutral handling balance. To that end, variable-ratio 'Progressive' steering is standard and the steering rack is mounted directly, with stiffer bushes. Braking is by-wire to ensure a smooth transition between friction and regenerative braking. The Torsen centre differential has been traded for a fully variable clutch pack, and an electronically controlled limited-slip diff on the rear axle is standard on the S5, as are adaptive dampers.

INTERIOR

★★★⯪☆

PROS Good seats and driving position; infotainment works well; easy to use despite lack of buttons
CONS Plain design; average material quality; below-average practicality

The super-solid build quality, satisfyingly clicky switches and high-quality materials that characterised the old S4 and S5 are a thing of the past. Instead, like the Q6 E-tron, the new S5's interior is dominated by its screens.

There's a big, curved display that incorporates the gauges and the centre infotainment screen, as well as a passenger display. The wall of screens is very modern but won't be to all tastes. The screens are paired with plenty of fingerprint- and scratch-sensitive gloss black plastic and you don't have to look hard to find other cheap-feeling materials around the cabin.

■ Triangular or trapezoid elements are becoming a design cue for sporty Audis. S Line A5s have them as well, making the S5's (genuine) quad exhausts the only way to know what you're looking at. All the trim that is silver on our Launch Edition test car will be gloss black on the Edition 1 that you can actually buy.

■ Door handles are purely electronic, with no mechanical back-up. If the 12V battery dies, you need to hook up an emergency power supply through an access port in the bumper in order to get in.

The saving graces of Audi's screen-heavy design direction are that there are just enough physical buttons and the software generally works well. You can quickly switch between various functions thanks to a permanent selection of shortcuts and the system responds swiftly to your inputs.

Even so, there are a few frustrations: the navigation doesn't offer a choice of routes and the driver display insists on showing a distracting graphic of a car driving down the road at all times.

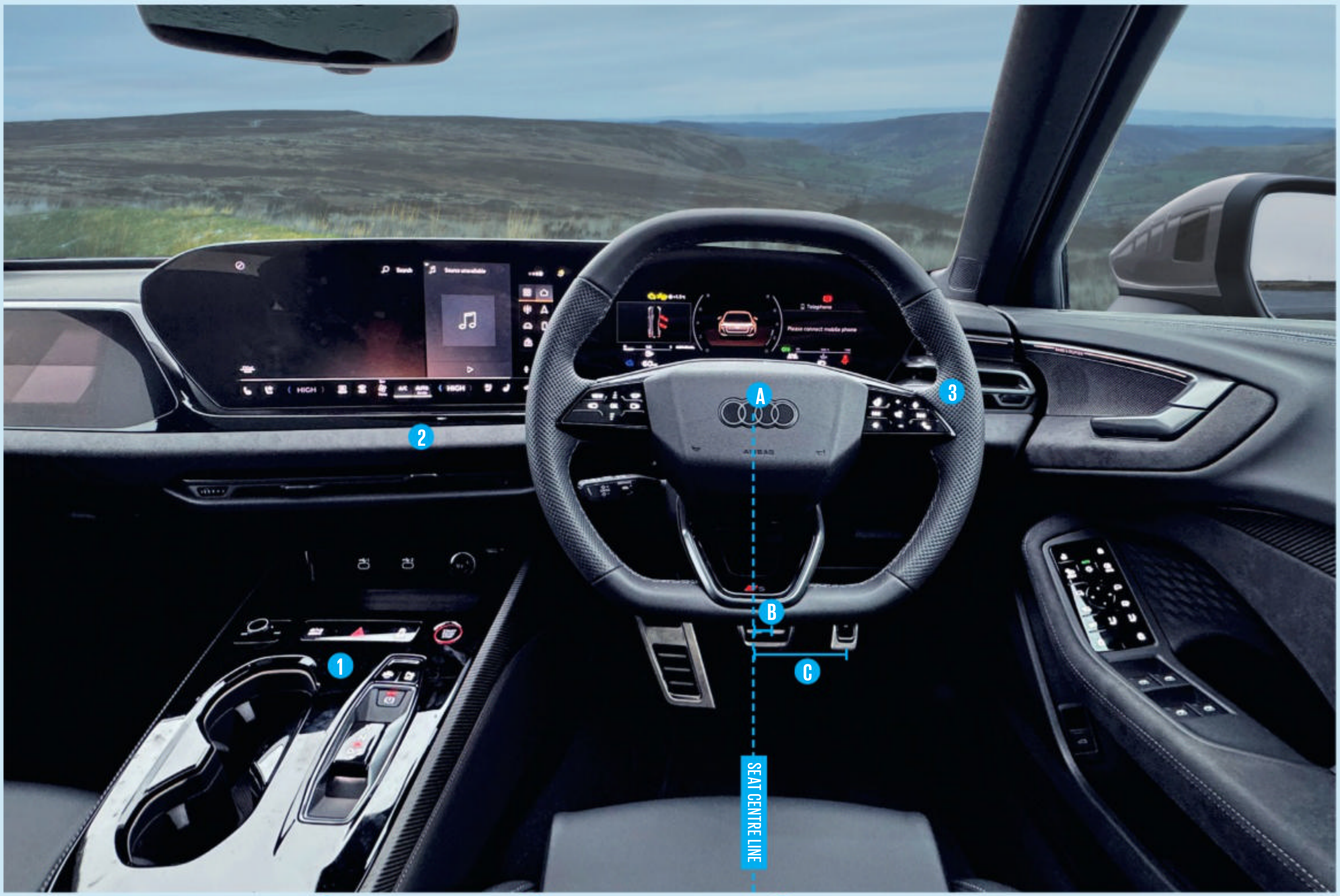
Thankfully, the fundamentals of the S5's interior are better considered. It has a fine driving position, with plenty of adjustment in all directions, and Audi says the new PPC platform has liberated some leg room. Indeed, we measured 35mm more rear leg room than in the old S4, putting it on a par with the BMW 3 Series. Head room in the S5 Saloon is limited by the sloping roofline, so we would recommend the Avant for carrying rear passengers.

Skoda Superb owners won't be ▸

① Gloss black plastic on the centre console would feel cheap in an A3, let alone in an S5. It quickly gathers fingerprints and scratches as you paw at the few remaining physical buttons.

② Central dashboard spar is rendered in microsuede. If you choose the red leather interior, it becomes red as well, adding a bit of colour to an otherwise dark environment.

③ Steering wheel has a thin rim and feels good in your hands. Buttons are touch-sensitive, which means you can change the volume by accident. Annoying and unnecessary.



WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT Ⓐ Steering offset 0mm Ⓑ Brake offset 80mm right Ⓒ Accelerator offset 220mm right. Pedal box's strong right offset could be an issue for shorter drivers. Seat and steering wheel have enough adjustment for most people to find a good driving position.

◂ impressed by the Audi's boot space, which stands at 417 litres – down on both the BMW 3 Series and Mercedes C-Class. You will look in vain for clever features too. There are no levers to fold down the rear seats and the underfloor storage is taken up by the battery.

PERFORMANCE

★★★★☆

PROS Enjoyably quick; hybrid system is an asset at town speeds; honest, subtly sporting sound **CONS** Some will want more volume; imperfect gearbox

With 362bhp, the new S5 is no particular step up from what went before. The old S4 had 349bhp before it got a diesel engine and the rival BMW M340i has 369bhp but, as we will see, that's plenty for an enjoyably quick sports saloon.

Despite being very slightly down on power and a good deal heavier, the S5 was broadly as quick in a straight line as the BMW M440i xDrive we tested in 2021. Up to 80mph, they are only a tenth of a second apart in all metrics, with the BMW getting slightly ahead at autobahn speeds. A 4.3sec 0-62mph time makes this a very quick car indeed, and it's hard to see the need for any more performance.

The way the S5 deploys its power is surprisingly subtle. Audi could have made this car shout about itself much more, but we're glad it hasn't, because not everybody wants the sort of bravado that the upcoming RS5 is likely to provide.

In everyday motoring, the V6 is remarkably smooth and quiet. Setting the drive mode to Dynamic liberates a bit more exhaust noise, but it remains civilised at all times.

Inside the cabin at least, the engine doesn't particularly sound like a V6. Instead, its sonic character is closer to the M340i's straight six, all smooth and breathy. It doesn't really seem synthesised either, with a hint of mechanical thrash making its way inside at certain rpm.

The hybrid system gives new dimensions to this powertrain, such as the ability to float around town or creep forward in heavy traffic without the engine wasting fuel. As the motor has only 24bhp, keeping the engine turned off requires a very light right foot, but that can be a fun game to play. Thanks to the fairly large battery, the S5 can cover decent distances without rousing the engine. The motor also emits a slight whine during acceleration and regen, lending it a dash of character. Curiously, there's no way to monitor the battery's state of charge, which precluded low-SoC testing. Subjectively, we didn't detect a drop-off in performance.

The engine drives through a seven-speed dual-clutch automatic and we wish Audi had stuck with an eight-speed torque-converter automatic. The dual-clutch unit has no notable advantage in shift speed, and although the smooth engagement of the electric motor can save the gearbox's blushes at low speed, the car can lurch slightly when downshifting through the lower gears or when called on suddenly. This is accompanied by audible clattering too. Occasionally, when switching between petrol and electric power, we detected some whirring noises, as if one of the drive sources wasn't engaging properly. This promising new drivetrain concept could evidently do with a little more fine-tuning.

RIDE & HANDLING

★★★★⯨

PROS Adaptive dampers allow for an absorbent ride as well as tight body control; much nimbler handling than Audis of old; mature ADAS **CONS** Seats are a little basic; steering could offer more feedback

The subtle character of the powertrain is reflected in the S5's chassis too. You might expect a fast Audi to have firm suspension and artificially heavy steering but none of that applies here.

The first thing you notice when you set off is the ride, which is remarkably supple and doesn't seem to suffer much from the 20in wheels with 35-profile tyres. Adaptive dampers are standard on the S5 and can be set to three levels of firmness: Comfort, Balanced and Dynamic. Weirdly, we found Comfort to be the least useful, because both body and wheel control suffer with the looser set-up. Balanced, however, is what it says and deals very adeptly with both big bumps and rough surfaces. The S5 proved a very relaxing cruiser, generating just 67dBA at 70mph.

Audi's assisted driving features are generally quite good, with smooth and responsive adaptive cruise control and easy shortcuts to toggle the overspeed warning and lane keeping assistance.

The seats could be better, though. While they are by no means uncomfortable or especially lacking in adjustment, the seats in a high-spec Volkswagen Passat or Skoda Superb offer more of everything.

What's even more surprising than the S5's plush ride is how game it is to be driven hard. You need to set the drive mode to Dynamic to liberate a bit more exhaust noise and take some slack out the suspension, but even with the dampers in their firmest mode, they maintain enough compliance to take an evil B-road in their stride.

The steering remains fairly light and not the most communicative, but despite the variable-ratio rack, it's precise and intuitive, letting you place the car exactly where you want it and giving you the confidence that the front end is going to grip.

With the V6 still hanging ahead of the front axle line and causing a 56:44 front-to-rear weight balance, the S5's turn-in may not be as immediate as that of a hot BMW 3 Series, but the difference is not night and day. Meanwhile, the switch from a Torsen centre differential to a multi-plate clutch has given the S5 a tangible rear-driven balance. When you get on the power in faster corners, you can feel the car neatly tighten its line. In slower ones, it's even possible to get a sliver of oversteer with the ESC in Sport mode.

On the whole, Audi has struck an impressive balance here. The S5 has all the ride comfort and isolation you might expect of a sub-luxury car while also giving the keen driver something to sink their teeth into, all without losing the secure four-wheel-drive traction that Audi has long been known for.

TRACK NOTES

★★★★☆

PROS Accessible and enjoyable handling balance; strong brakes in the wet and dry

CONS Stability control could be more on the ball

The S5's new-found talent on the road translates to very credible track performance as well. Few owners are likely to take their S5s on a circuit, but perhaps they should. The V6 makes short work of the straights without its performance being overwhelming and the brakes feel strong, with solid pedal feel and good endurance.

While it's no drift monster like a BMW M3, there's enough adjustability on and off the power for drivers to experiment in a safe way. With the ESC disabled, it's possible to rotate the car into the corner and then four-wheel drift out on the power.

However, on Horiba MIRA's wet handling course, which simulates slippery and wintry conditions, it appears that the S5 has sacrificed a little Audi-typical sure-footedness. As in the dry, the experienced driver will enjoy the throttle-adjustability. But with all the systems on, a mid-corner stab of the throttle can still cause a spike of oversteer before the ESC intervenes. This will often also tighten the seatbelts, which seems unnecessary. Straight-line traction remains very strong and a wet-surface braking figure of 51.3m from 70mph is up there with the best we have tested.

BUYING & OWNING

★★★★☆

PROS Hybrid system makes a clear difference at low speed; well equipped

CONS Little room for personalisation

Prices for the S5 Saloon start at £69,455 and the Avant estate costs an additional £1900. That's about £10,000 more than for a BMW M340i, which is mainly due to Audi UK offering the S5 in only one, fully loaded trim, the Edition 1. Spec the BMW to the same level and the two are within a few hundred pounds of each other. PCP finance rates are closely matched with rivals.

A brief note on our particular test car: Audi's first examples of a new model tend to be a Launch Edition, a spec that's shared across Europe even if that particular configuration won't be available to customers in the UK. In the case of the S5, our Launch Edition test car is mechanically identical to Edition 1 customer cars, with only cosmetic differences.

The pertinent question is whether that hybrid system makes a meaningful impact on fuel economy. As ever with hybrids, the answer is that it depends on how you use the vehicle. We would expect motorway fuel consumption, where the electric motor is contributing little, to be largely unaffected. However, for a 3.0-litre V6 petrol engine to return 39.4mpg on the 'everyday' test, which simulates town and suburban driving, is quite an achievement and is thanks to the extended periods of engine-off running. Note the difference with the 28.3mpg of the 3.0-litre six-cylinder petrol Alpina B3 GT on p36, which has a more highly tuned engine, it must be noted.

Audi offers a three-year, 60,000-mile warranty, which is comparable to BMW's three-year, unlimited-mileage one if you cover an average number of miles. A five-year, 90,000-mile extended warranty is available for £995, which may be a wise investment given Volkswagen Group cars' patchy reliability record. ▸

FRONT Leg room 1125mm, head room 1090mm. Front seats are comfy but not quite as supportive as the ergonomic ones in other VW Group cars.

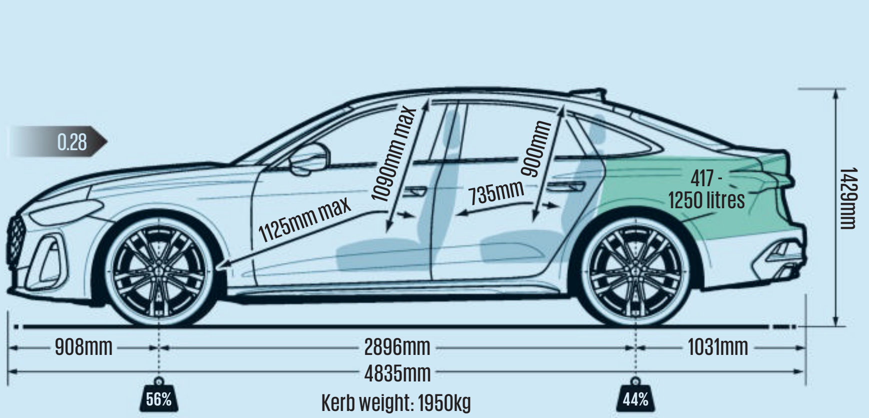
REAR Leg room 735mm, head room 900mm. There is more rear leg room than in the outgoing S4 but adults will be short of head room in the back.

BOOT Length 1090-1890mm, width 1030mm, height 500-670mm. Boot is smaller than in rival saloons, but the hatchback layout adds practicality.

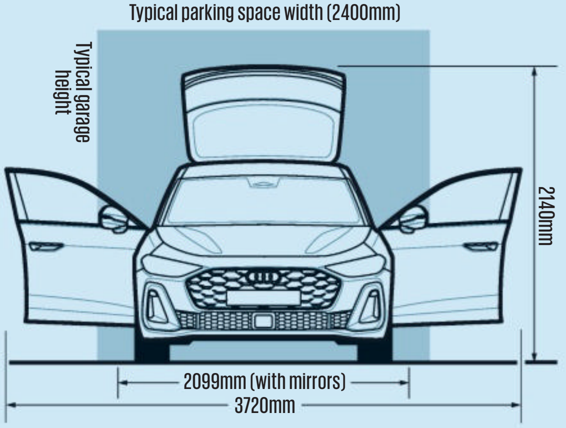
> **"It's surprising how game the S5 is to be driven hard"**

TEST RESULTS

DIMENSIONS

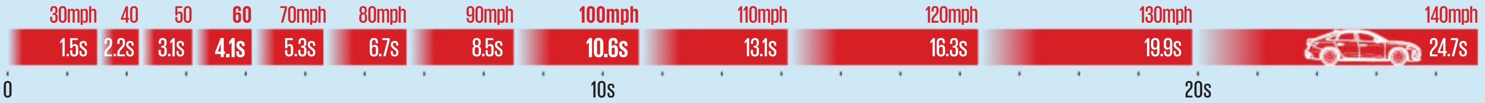

0.28
1090mm max
900mm
1125mm max
735mm
417 - 1250 litres
1429mm
908mm
2896mm
1031mm
4835mm
56%
Kerb weight: 1950kg
44%

PARKING

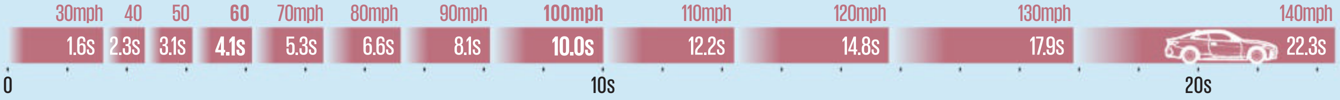

Typical parking space width (2400mm)
Typical garage height
2140mm
2099mm (with mirrors)
3720mm

ACCELERATION

Test conditions 10deg C, slightly damp
Standing quarter mile 12.7sec at 108.6mph **Standing km** 23.4sec at 137.9mph **30-70mph** 3.8sec **30-70mph in fourth** 5.5sec **0-62mph** 4.3sec

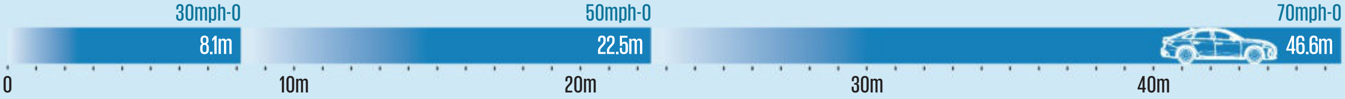


BMW M440i xDrive Coupé (2021, 5deg C, damp patches)
Standing quarter mile na **Standing km** na **30-70mph** 3.7sec **30-70mph in fourth** 5.4sec **0-62mph** 4.5sec (claimed)

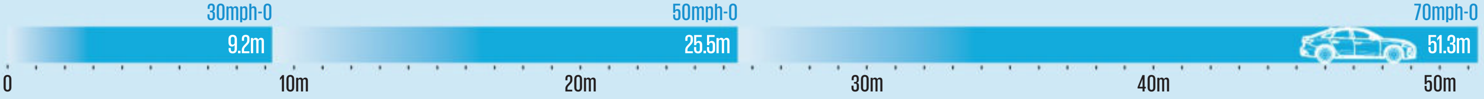


BRAKING

Dry 60-0mph 2.56sec



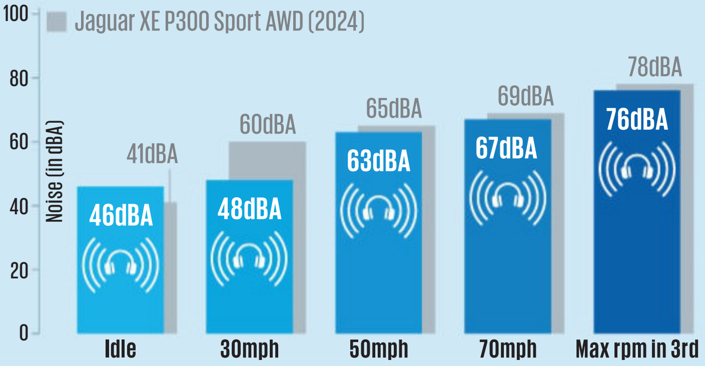
Wet 60-0mph 2.86sec



ACCELERATION IN GEAR

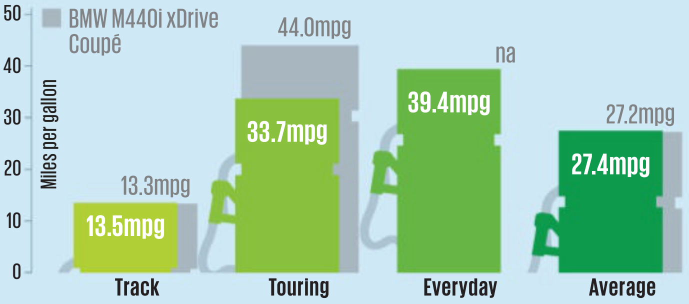
mph	Time (sec) 2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th
20-40	1.5	2.1	3.1			
30-50	1.6	2.0	2.6	4.2		
40-60		2.1	2.7	3.8	5.9	
50-70		2.3	2.8	3.9	5.4	8.6
60-80			2.9	4.1	5.6	7.7
70-90			3.2	4.4	6.1	8.3
80-100			3.8	4.7	6.9	9.9
90-110				4.9	7.7	
100-120				5.6		
110-130				6.9		

CABIN NOISE



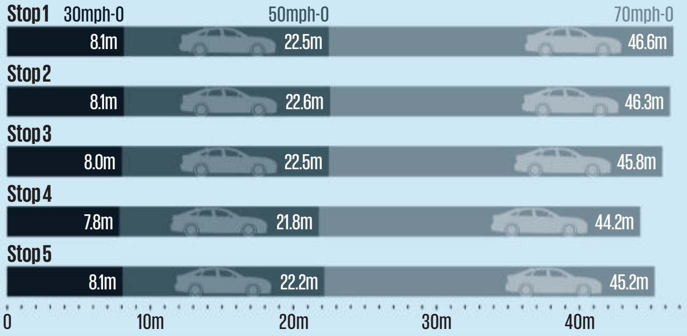
RUNNING EFFICIENCY

WLTP 36.2mpg (combined) **Test range** 338/415/485 miles (average/touring/everyday)



BRAKING ENDURANCE

Fade variance 70-0m – stop 1 vs stop 5: -1.4m



PETER LIDDIARD

THE SMALL PRINT Power-to-weight and torque-to-weight figures are calculated using manufacturer's claimed kerb weight. © 2025, Haymarket Media Group Ltd. Test results may not be reproduced without editor's written permission. For information on the S5, contact Audi Customer Services, PO Box 9004, Leeds, LS1 9WA (0800 699 888, audi.co.uk).

MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION

AUDI S5 SALOON LAUNCH EDITION

On-the-road price £68,525
Price as tested £68,525
Value after 3yrs/36k miles £32,050
Contract hire £1130 pcm* (3+36 months, 30,000 miles)
Typical PCP £979 pcm* (£10,400 deposit + 37 months/30,000 miles)
Insurance group 42E

FITTED EQUIPMENT

Standard 20in alloy wheels, matrix LED headlights, adaptive dampers, adaptive cruise control, leather sports seats with heating, ventilation and memory

HYBRID POWERTRAIN

Engine Front, longitudinal, 4WD
Type V6, 2995cc, turbo, petrol
Motor Gearbox-mounted; 24bhp, 170lb ft
Battery type LFP
Capacity 1.7kWh (total)
Voltage 48V
Total power 362bhp at 5500-6300rpm
Total torque 406lb ft at 1700-4000rpm
Power to weight 186bhp per tonne
Torque to weight 208lb ft per tonne
Specific output 121bhp per litre

GEARBOX

Type 7-spd dual-clutch automatic
Ratios/mph per 1000rpm
1st 3.19/5.7 **2nd** 2.19/8.2 **3rd** 1.52/11.9
4th 1.06/17.1 **5th** 0.74/24.4
6th 0.56/32.4 **7th** 0.43/41.7
rpm in top at 70/80mph 1680/1920

CHASSIS & BODY

Construction Steel and aluminium monocoque
Weight/as tested 1950kg/2027kg
Wheels 8.5Jx20in
Tyres 245/35 R20 98Y, Goodyear Eagle F1 SuperSport R0
Spare None (mobility kit)

SUSPENSION & STEERING

Front MacPherson struts, coil springs, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar **Rear** Multi-link, coil springs, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar
Steering Variable-ratio EPAS, rack and pinion; 2.3 turns lock to lock; 12.1m turning circle

BRAKES

Front 360mm ventilated discs
Rear 350mm ventilated discs
Handbrake type Electronic

SAFETY

Euro NCAP rating 5 stars (2025, A5) Adult occupant 87%, child occupant 88%, vulnerable road users 78%, safety assist 77%

EMISSIONS & TAX

CO_2 176g/km
BIK at 20/40% pcm £421/£824*
**Edition 1, Horizon Blue paint*

VERDICT

Well-rounded sports saloon with driver appeal

★★★★☆

Audi appears to be in a mood to reinvent itself, moving beyond old virtues and cultivating new ones. The new S5 follows the Q6 E-tron in trading a class-leading interior for a new-found dose of driver appeal. Indeed, it has a particularly well-judged chassis that combines plush ride comfort with a balance of stability and entertainment.

On top of that, the S5 also retains a characterful V6 when some rivals can offer only a four-cylinder, or no engine at all. It can do so thanks to the introduction of a new hybrid system, which boosts low-speed efficiency with no major downsides.

In adopting a high-tech interior layout, it has just sacrificed a little too much material richness, tactility and, for some, traditional design appeal.

Fundamentally, though, the new S5 is a very rounded and modern sports saloon.

TESTERS' NOTES

ILLYA VERPRAET
I've encountered the new S5 a few times now and at first I thought it was a bit bland. But having been out-grilled by BMW, Audi has gone for a subtler look. I must say it's growing on me, although I would have an Avant estate.

MATT SAUNDERS
Audi seems to be all about lighting features these days. You can customise the pattern for the headlights and tail-lights, which seems gimmicky to me, particularly since it's of no use to the driver. The adaptive headlights are very powerful, detailed and fast-acting, however.

FACELIFT FIXES

- Restore some of the material richness and interior build quality from previous cars.
- Fit better seats.
- Ditch the touch-sensitive steering wheel controls.

RANKING RIVALS

	1	2	3	4	5	6
		AUDI S5				
	BMW M340i XDRIVE BMW's sports saloon is very hard to beat for all-round driver satisfaction, even if the interior isn't as good as it used to be.		**ALFA ROMEO GIULIA QUADRIFOGLIO** More of an RS5 rival, but not much more money. Harder work yet a sensational driver's car.	**PORSCHE PANAMERA 4** S5's distant relation uses a similar engine but adds Porscheness. Bigger and a lot pricier.	**POLESTAR 2 LONG RANGE DUAL MOTOR PERFORMANCE** EV take on the subtle, all-weather sports saloon is versatile and entertaining.	**MERCEDES-AMG CLE 53 PREMIUM** Gaining two cylinders means losing two doors at AMG. Quick and grippy; slightly inert.
	★★★★½		★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★½☆
Price	£59,835		£80,545	£86,568	£55,949	£73,075
Power, torque	369bhp, 369lb ft		513bhp, 443lb ft	349bhp, 369lb ft	469bhp, 546lb ft	442bhp, 413lb ft
0-62mph, top speed	4.4sec, 155mph		3.9sec, 191mph	5.0sec, 168mph	4.0sec, 127mph	4.2sec, 155mph
CO_2, economy	192g/km, 33.2mpg		229g/km, 28.0mpg	230g/km, 28.0mpg	0g/km, 3.7mpkWh	217g/km, 29.5mpg

AUTOCAR **ROAD TEST 5718**

BMW ALPINA B3

‘Last of the last’ offering marks the end for Alpina as we have known it

During 2025, Autocar will subject around 100 cars to full and exacting road test scrutiny at Horiba MIRA proving ground, and for some manufacturers it will be the very first time. However, for one much-loved marque, we can say for sure that the reverse will be true.

In December, Alpina – formally Alpina Burkard Bovensiepen GmbH + Co KG – will cease to exist as ownership of the brand name transfers to the BMW Group and the workshops in Buchloe cease to make contemporary BMW-based creations. In what precise direction BMW chooses to take the Alpina brand will become apparent in due course, but what is certain is that the Alpina as we have always known it will be consigned to the past.

It means this is the final year of production in the Bovensiepen era, and to mark that fact, three special-edition, GT-badged cars have been launched. One is the all-new B3 GT tested here, while similar treatment is also being given to the lesser-spotted B4 Gran Coupé. Later in the year, a B8 GT will appear with what promises to be truly spectacular reserves of power and torque – and a price to match.

We may get the chance to attach the telemetry gear to the B8 GT, but it isn’t guaranteed, and so this test of the B3 GT Touring could be our last road test of what will surely come to be known as ‘proper’ Alpinas.

DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★★☆

PROS A comprehensive and detail-focused conversion; likeably subtle

CONS No lighter than the basic B3 Touring on our scales

Alpina’s GT-specific alterations to the regular, recently discontinued B3 recipe are small but effective – at least when it comes to performance.

At the heart of the car sits the same lightly fettled version of the 3.0-litre S58 straight six from the BMW M3, although this time it’s more powerful than ever. This generation of B3 made its debut in 2020 with 456bhp, and that was increased for the mid-life update in 2022. For this final iteration, power swells again to 522bhp and would probably be greater still were there not a long-standing agreement that Alpina won’t out-box the equivalent BMW. The company doesn’t half run it close, mind: the updated M3, including the Touring, has 523bhp.

There is no such arrangement when it comes to torque, and the B3 GT’s 538lb ft is a simply monumental figure for a mere 3 Series and runs close the 553lb ft of even the old V8-engined M5 CS. It’s also a figure that sits near the S58’s reliable limit, judging by the fact that the 2022 B3 made 529lb ft. Where the GT improves matters is beyond 5500rpm. Here the extra power makes itself known and higher torque levels linger.

MODEL TESTED

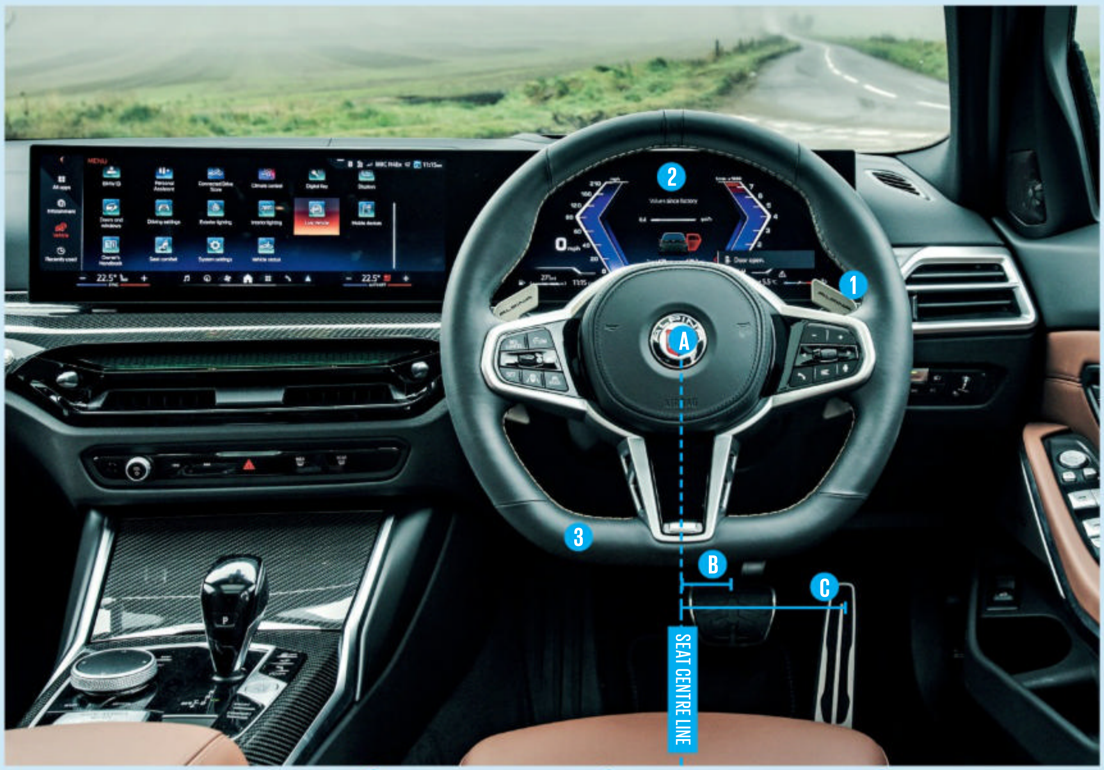
BMW ALPINA B3 GT TOURING

Price £90,400
Power 522bhp at 6250-6500rpm
Torque 538lb ft at 2500-4500rpm
0-60mph 3.3sec
30-70mph 2.7sec
Top speed 190mph (claimed)
Average economy 24.5mpg
Touring economy 29.4mpg
CO_2 emissions 241g/km
70-0mph 42.7m (11deg C, dry)

① Alpina's hefty aluminium paddles continue to outshine anything you will find on an M car, and for the GT are painted 'Oro Tecnico' to match the wheels.

② Digital instrument display gets Alpina's own fonts and colours, although BMW's questionable presentation of the speedo and rev counter remains.

③ Flat-bottomed steering wheel is another element that's new for the GT, and is essentially the same as you will find in an M3, only with less carbonfibre, more Lavalina.



WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT Ⓐ Steering offset 0mm Ⓑ Brake offset 60mm right Ⓒ Accelerator offset 195mm right. Driving position is excellent, but you could do with a little extra lateral support on occasion.

The driveline is still an enhanced version of the xDrive found in the M340i, which is the basis of the B3. Alpina shifts the default torque split forward for greater stability and all-season traction. The gearbox is a ZF-sourced automatic that borrows parts from V8 applications, so it can cope with the onslaught of torque. The regular B3's plethora of additional radiators and cooling tracts is unchanged for the GT, as is the surprisingly modest contact patch, via ALP-marked Pirelli rubber. The 265-section rear tyres on the Alpina are narrower than the M3's fronts. Note also that where an M3 Touring employs a staggered set-up for more natural adjustability, the B3 uses 20in wheels at each end.

Elsewhere, Alpina has beefed up the car's rear anti-roll bar and tweaked the EPAS calibration. Both measures have been taken to make the B3 keener to turn in to bends. New and attractive dome-to-bulkhead struts have also been fitted to increase the car's natural precision and agility, and there is a new, GT-specific damper set-up, although Alpina says this is more to guarantee comfort is retained. Like every Alpina in recent times, the B3 GT has a special Comfort Plus damper mode, which is something you won't find in an M3 or M340i.

As for how you identify a B3 GT, the giveaways are the forged wheels and the presence of canards on the front bumper. Yes, canards, on an Alpina. Before this recent raft of GT-badged wares, downforce-enhancing canards haven't been seen on an Alpina since the E92-based – and commendably hardcore – B3 GT3. Necessary? Debatable. Then again, the GT is a 190mph car, and it all helps. Alpina has also reprofiled the rear diffuser.

One area in which we might have expected improvement is weight. The GT's 1910kg (with a full tank) makes it 30kg heavier than the regular B3 we weighed in 2020 and 40kg heavier than claimed. That's no disgrace, and on paper the M3 Touring is only 5kg lighter. But given the presence of canards and forged wheels (each 4kg lighter than standard), sub-1900kg was expected.

INTERIOR

★★★★☆

PROS BMW ergonomics are superb; same for Alpina's accoutrements

CONS Plenteous Lavalina leather can get eye-wateringly expensive

It was during the wider update of the 3 Series range in 2022 that the B3 adopted the broad, vivid displays now found in the GT. They could hardly be sharper, although some testers missed the presence of an instrument cowling and that traditional cockpit feel. Nonetheless, Alpina's digital 'skin' for the dials is attractive and helps differentiate the car from its donor.

The GT gets the flat-bottomed, thick-rimmed wheel of the updated 3 Series, but it is as ever trimmed in ultra-soft Lavalina leather. As standard, the seats are half-trimmed in 'PerformTex', but this car has full merino leather in 'Tartufo' – a £3800 option that feels adequately special. Note that full Lavalina trim is unavailable as the saddlery at Buchloe can't meet demand.

Elsewhere, the GT gets bronzed gearshift paddles and an artful carbonfibre moulding across the dash, as well as offset 'GT' logos stitched into the headrest. It's a typically rarefied Alpina interior – one that feels as if it should belong in a 5 or 7 Series but has somehow been made available in a mere 3 Series. Alpina might, however, have found a way to offer the M3's wild buckets. ▸

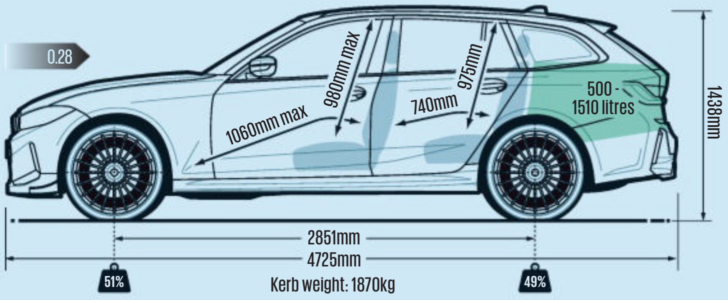
■ Open the bonnet and you will find Alpina's version of the S58 straight six as well as strut braces rather more artfully wrought than those of the M3. They are absolutely beautiful.

■ Canards admittedly feel more for show than go but, with the bronzed 20in wheels, differentiate this car from the regular GT. 'High-performance' brake kit is also standard fit.

PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

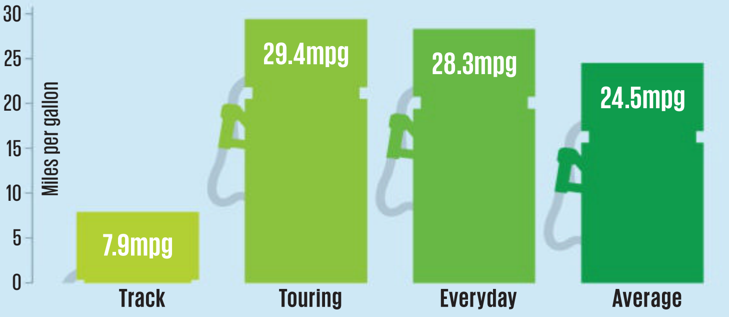
TEST RESULTS

DIMENSIONS



RUNNING EFFICIENCY

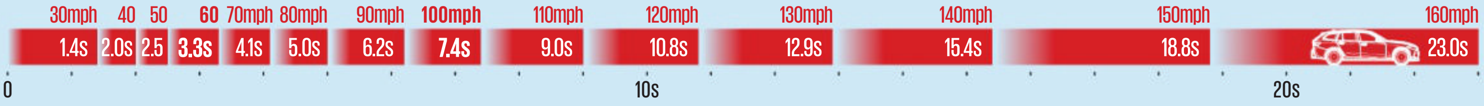
WLTP 26.6mpg (combined) **Test range** 318/382/367 miles (average/touring/everyday)



ACCELERATION

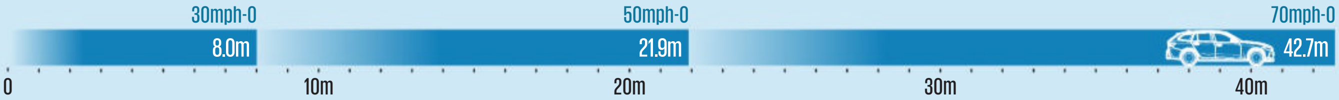
BMW Alpina B3 GT Touring (11deg C, dry)

Standing quarter mile 11.4sec at 123.5mph **Standing km** 20.9sec at 155.3mph **30-70mph** 2.7sec **30-70mph in fourth** 4.8sec **0-62mph** 3.4sec

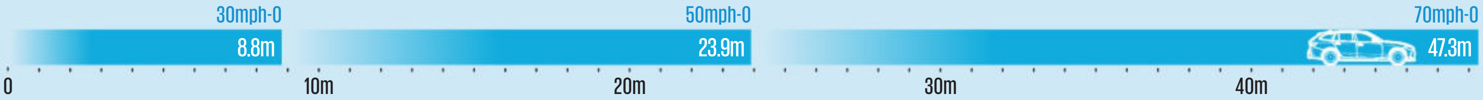


BRAKING

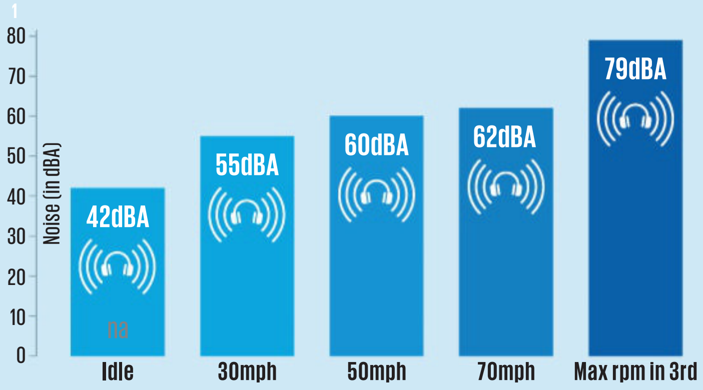
Dry 60-0mph 2.36sec



Wet 60-0mph 2.65sec



CABIN NOISE



MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION

BMW ALPINA B3 GT TOURING

On-the-road price £90,400
Price as tested £105,315
Insurance group 50

ENGINE

Installation Front, longitudinal, 4WD
Type 6 cyls in line, 2993cc, twin-turbocharged, petrol
Bore/stroke 84.0mm/90.0mm
Power 522bhp at 6250-6500rpm
Torque 538lb ft at 2500-4500rpm
Redline 7000rpm
Specific output 174bhp per litre
Power to weight 279bhp per tonne
Torque to weight 288lb ft per tonne

GEARBOX

Type 8-spd automatic
rpm in top gear at 70/80mph 1612/1842

CHASSIS & BODY

Construction Steel monocoque
Weight/as tested 1870kg/1910kg
Wheels 8.5Jx20in (f), 9.5Jx20in (r)
Tyres 255/30 ZR20 (f), 265/30 ZR20 (r), Pirelli P Zero 'ALP'

SUSPENSION & STEERING

Coil springs, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bars **Front** MacPherson struts **Rear** Multi-link **Steering** EPAS, rack and pinion; 2.2 turns lock to lock; 12.0m turning circle

"The GT is very much the everyday supercar"

For information on the B3 GT Touring, contact Alpina Automobiles UK, Sytner BMW Nottingham, Lenton Lane, Nottingham, NG7 2AX (0115 934 1414, alpina-automobiles.co.uk)

PETER LIDDIARD

PERFORMANCE

★★★★★

PROS A 3 Series this comfortable simply shouldn't be this rapid
CONS Brake pedal is a touch soft

Sending the B3 beyond the 500bhp barrier was always going to result in a very quick car. What we weren't prepared for is just how quick.

The claimed 0-62mph for the B3 GT Touring is already a scant 3.5sec (the saloon is rated at 3.4sec), and our test car went a tenth better. With launch control the getaway is viciously clean, and thereafter the powertrain initiates something of a pile-on, taking your breath away with its muscle as torque grips nearly two tonnes of metal and leather. We reached 100mph after just 7.4sec, making this lavish family estate a mere tenth slower than an M4 CSL to triple figures. The difference, of course, is that a B3 will put its vast reserves to work in nearly all conditions, whereas something like the CSL needs conditions to be close to optimal.

Indeed, it's the B3's ability to go from mooching around serenely to rattling off an overtake a Porsche 911 Turbo would be proud of that leaves you in awe of the thing. It is perfectly easy to drive in everyday use – and for the GT, Alpina even seems to have mollified the slight spasm of torque you would sometimes get under light throttle loads in previous iterations of the B3. Gearshifts are excellent without being an event in themselves (a dual-clutch unit would be required for that to be true), and the mapping is sensible. There is rarely if ever a point at which you can't get the car to accelerate how you want it to.

There's also genuine forced-induction character to this Alpina-tuned S58. Not just in the way the rate of acceleration markedly kicks up from about 2000rpm (delightfully old-school, this), but in the various pneumatic exertions you can hear. There's a lot going on.

As for braking, Alpina doesn't offer carbon-ceramic discs because Andreas Bovensiepen isn't a fan of them for road car applications, but the effectiveness of the GT's standard-fit 'high-performance' brake kit isn't in question. However, a little more bite and resistance in the pedal action would yield more confidence. Slowing the car down often requires 10% more commitment than expected, which just interrupts your flow a touch.

RIDE & HANDLING

★★★★½

PROS Stable, exploitable, accurate, but not averse to playing around
CONS Steering still a touch mute

Were you to drive the GT back to back with the regular B3, we have no doubt the precision of the special-edition car would be palpable. However, in isolation there isn't quite enough to differentiate the two. This is mostly down to the steering, of which there is nothing untoward in terms of the speed of the rack and weight of the action – both are sweetly judged – but there remains a slight remoteness and lack of communication that might have been improved on. The GT tracks into corners faithfully and accurately, but your exit is generally a more enjoyable and carefree exercise than entry, and this is particularly true in the wet. By comparison, an M3 Touring bites hungrily and vividly on turn-in.

Ultimately it's a minor flaw. A tiny blot on an otherwise spotless copybook. The B3 GT has a degree of compliance rare and perhaps unique among cars that will crack 60mph in 3.3sec, yet its suspension has breadth enough to cope with barrelling down a tawdry B-road without losing control of the body, if you select Sport Plus mode. There is a discernible polish to its manner.

The car also has a duality that means it will respond to heavy-handed inputs on a damp road with total traction and stability, yet it will indulge more careful drivers with delicious slithers of yaw and a natural adjustability. The GT also thrives in inclement weather, and is very much the everyday supercar.

Moreover, if the GT is as fast as an M3 in its point-to-point pace, long-distance comfort is superior to that of an M340i fitted with its M Sport springs. Alpina could have chosen to sacrifice a little rolling refinement for dynamic bite with this special edition, but most owners will probably be glad it didn't. GT or not, in a B3, 500-mile days remain straightforward fare.

BUYING & OWNING

★★★★☆

PROS Fantastically versatile; status and brand ensure strong residuals
CONS More expensive than an M3 Touring; D3 still the economy king

The B3 has advanced somewhat from the £67k proposition it was in 2020. At £90k, the GT is a little more expensive than even the M3 Touring, and it's a good £11k more than the standard B3, a car facelifted in 2022, was. It's also the only B3 you can now buy from new.

Equally, the forged wheels, dark tailpipes and high-performance brakes are standard on the GT but were pricey options on the regular car, so the uplift in price isn't that large in reality. It will be rare too: expect fewer than 100 UK cars. And residuals an M3 couldn't dream of.

SI7 NER
ALPINA

VERDICT

Last-dance B3 has mighty breadth and will go down as one of the all-time greats

★★★★½

'Fitness for purpose': it's the criterion that underpins every Autocar test verdict, and it's a quality that Alpina's take on the 3 Series continues to nail. The B3 GT is an expensive extravagance and ballistically quick, but its ease of use, versatility and quiet specialness will make it a joy to own whether or not you tap into its epic reserves of all-weather, point-to-point pace. It is the marriage of that pace with comfort and stability that has always defined the B3, and so while we might have liked a touch more dynamic bite in the GT, we can understand Alpina's decision to prioritise balance to the last.

RIVALS

BMW M3 TOURING
From £87,945
★★★★½

2 **BMW ALPINA B3 GT**

AUDI RS4 AVANT
From £85,105
★★★★☆

MERCEDES-AMG C63 S E PERFORMANCE
From £96,805
★★★☆☆

4 PINTS
THE NIGHT
BEFORE

One in five drink drive prosecutions happen the morning after[A], many unaware they still have alcohol left in their system from the night before. AlcoSense quickly and accurately tells you your blood alcohol level, so you don't become one of them.

The Telegraph

"a fresh level of accuracy in consumer breath testing"[B]

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A: Source: DfT Road Accident Data 2015, B: Review of the AlcoSense Pro, 24/12/15. Intellectual Property: www.alcosense.co.uk/ip. © AlcoSense Laboratories, part of Now Group UK Ltd, Unit 3 MEC, Cordwallis Street, Maidenhead SL6 7BE

MATT SAUNDERS

Testing, testing

New HS is fast becoming a familiar part of the British landscape

This may be the year in which so many new Chinese car brands finally hit UK showrooms. Within a soup that has been augmented with new ingredients only rarely over the years, we will rather suddenly have Jaecoos, Havals, Leapmotors, Xpengs, IMs and more to get to know. We will need to work out what the hell the plural of a Seres is, then, and explain to everyone that Skywell makes not air-conditioning units but electric cars.

The EU's tariffs on EVs imported from China may now draw these brands to the UK market sooner than anticipated, making us continental experts on these newbies. Are we to be flooded with them? You can bet that certain quarters of the national press will say so. But it's okay: we can all just agree not to buy the rubbish ones, and if you're not sure which those are, well, you know where to find out.

Brits are, of course, already buying the good ones. One Chinese import in particular was on the fringe of the UK's top-five best-selling new cars in 2024, as recorded by the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders: the MG HS. MG sold more of these combustion-engined, mid-sized SUVs than Audi did A3s or Volkswagen did Polos. Chinese imports from brands including BMW, Citroën, Smart and Volvo failed to even come close to emulating its success.

Poverty spec? Doesn't look like it. Doesn't feel like it either

> **"There is little if any sense of cheapness or austerity about it"**

Since I had no first-hand experience of such an important and successful car, I considered it my duty to spend some time in one recently. Was I illuminated? A little. Surprised? Perhaps. Reassured? Less so, mostly because I've had plenty of experience of other current MG models and already knew that the brand is way beyond pushing sub-standard products for junk prices. Suffice to say that, if you are labouring under that kind of misapprehension, a few days in an HS would be enough to cure you of it.

It is, first and foremost, that budget-brand old chestnut: a lot of metal for the money. It's a family-sized SUV with practicality and space that you could compare with, say, the Audi Q5 but can get for the price of a Skoda Kamiq. MG actually pitches it against the likes of the Kia Sportage, Hyundai Tucson and Citroën C5 Aircross, although it undercuts even them on price, as well as outreaching many of them for usable space.

The seats are comfortable; the boot is generous; the body design is neat, modern and inoffensive. There is certainly little if any pervading sense of cheapness or austerity about the HS, aside from one or two low-rent dashboard mouldings. MG has learned to spend on the components that users will touch regularly: column stalks, window switches, door releases and cubby fixtures. These all feel what we might snootily – and possibly quite unjustifiably – call 'European grade'.

Does the driving experience match up? Our first drive review of the 1.5-litre turbo petrol HS last year suggested that the entry-level model has hints of coarseness, clunkiness and lethargy about its performance, which sounds to me a bit like the MG of 10 years ago. But I tested the more powerful plug-in hybrid model, which mates a different 1.5-litre petrol engine with a 207bhp electric motor and a two-speed automatic gearbox. It was quiet, quick, assured and really rather pleasant.

Not to mention generous with its electric-only range (which might explain why the HS has been selling so well). MG claims some 75 miles – genuinely exceptional for something you can buy for less than £32,000 and giving the HS really strong fleet appeal. In the real world, it delivers between 55 and 65 miles before the petrol engine kicks in, and it handles competently and drives in entirely viceless fashion but for the irksomeness of the driver assistance systems (from which you are, after all, never safe whatever you buy in 2025) and the poor usability of the touchscreen infotainment system.

But my takeaway was what a 'proper', rounded modern car the HS is and how well it stands up in bog-standard daily use, whether you plug it in, care about the phoney aggregated MPG, know how much it costs or none of the above. Its success clearly isn't bought but earned.

Heavyweight champions

The new BMW M5 is a 2.4-tonne, big-hitting PHEV, but has it met its match with the Porsche Panamera? **MATT SAUNDERS** referees

PHOTOGRAPHY MAX EDLESTON

The seventh-generation BMW M5 super-saloon is, right now, lurking ominously in my rear-view mirror as the winter dawn breaks slowly on the westbound M4. That car has much to prove and today it should have some great roads to prove it on, and a fair, modern rival against which to compete – rather than being weighed down by many decades of wonderful, celebrated and broadly irrelevant performance car heritage.

On which topic, I wonder if the M division management might now consider it a mistake to have rolled out so many old-generation M5 'heritage vehicles' on the international press launch of this new model a couple of months ago. Naivety? Misplaced confidence? Hubris, even?

Reactions to this car from those at the event have been a little varied. But few testers argued that it felt anything other than big, heavy and necessarily complex – a little uncommunicative and lacking, perhaps, in simple, accessible fun factor. Frankly, next to a 30-year-old, 1700kg E34-generation M5, which modern performance saloon wouldn't?

But will it today? The things that have made this G90-generation M5 weigh 2435kg in four-door form are after all entirely reasonable, understandable – even ineluctable – things. Howl at the moon if you like and blame BMW M for somehow failing to resist the legislative forces that have already led many of its rivals to electrify and will continue to do so for others. But then ask yourself this: would you rather not have a new M5 at all? What about one with a four-cylinder turbo engine? Or an electric rear axle that runs out of puff when the battery runs dry? What about an all-electric M5? Or one without electrification entirely but made in tiny numbers and priced like some diamond-encrusted unicorn? Those were probably the options and, regrettably perhaps, 'more of the same' almost certainly wasn't among them.

BMW M, it seems to me, has done its best to keep this car commercially viable in 2025, in the mechanical format that best suits it and best represents how we have come to know it.

And here's the thing. In the end, it has ▶

Panamera Turbo E-Hybrid has 671bhp and 686lb ft at its disposal

M5 is 4WD, like the Porsche, and puts out 718bhp and 738lb ft

◂ produced a car that is, in fact, only 75kg heavier than a Porsche Panamera Turbo E-Hybrid, the key rival with which we're comparing it today. Only 75kg. Weight is weight; it's evil, I get it. But, in the cold light of a wintry mountain day, 75kg might not prove to be a sum worth banging your desk and rolling your eyes about. Not in 2025, in a performance car at the bigger end of the market.

We'll see. For now, as the crepuscular gloom lifts, all I can see in the Porsche's rear-view mirror is the BMW's ridiculous 'Iconic Glow' kidney grille hovering there in the outside lane (which, I will admit, certainly is a few kilos that it didn't need). It's a little like being followed into the Welsh mountains by the angelic, reincarnated spirit of 1990s TV sitcom great – and master of the absurd – Gordon Brittas, in his most flared of nostril aero settings.

So can either of our 2.4-tonne super-saloons escape a sense of the absurd on the narrow, bumpy, beautiful A-roads of Rhondda?

SECONDS OUT...

BMW did its usual belt-and-braces job of the preamble to the launch of this M5. As you may have read, there were separate prototype drives on road and track last year – and in both saloon and returning Touring bodystyles – before we finally drove the finished car in November.

So you're unlikely to need a very detailed technical exposition of how much 'electrification' this car uses. We can simply note that the car still has a twin-turbo V8 up front and retains a mechanical, electronically controlled, switchable four-wheel drive system downstream of an eight-speed automatic gearbox.

It sticks to steel coil suspension springs (although they're progressively rated ones) and conventional anti-roll bars but it adopts an electric steering rack and four-wheel 'Integral Active' steering (the old F90-gen car didn't have this). And its hybrid system, shared with the humbler 530e PHEV, consists of a 194bhp electric motor integrated upstream of the gearbox and drawing power from an underfloor battery pack of just over 22kWh of total installed capacity.

How the Panamera compares leads you to some key realisations. It's less powerful, slightly, and yet quicker-accelerating, according to the spec sheet (with the even quicker Turbo S there in the showroom if you feel you need it). And, yes, it's lighter – despite having a bigger hybrid drive battery than its opponent, four-wheel steering as standard (just like the BMW), air suspension also as standard (unlike the BMW, a set-up that typically adds weight compared with steel coils) and an electric drive motor of very similar power to the M5's configured and located in much the same way.

The Panamera is the slightly lower, shorter car of the two but it's also the older car. So why wouldn't BMW have been able to beat the Porsche on kerb weight?

The answer, as M division engineers will admit when pressed, isn't to do with the M5's hybrid system at all. Rather, it's the chassis bracing needed to shore up a platform that's now been chopped about and modified so as to accommodate the all-electric i5, the long-wheelbase G68-gen 5 Series for China, and other variants. As M division technical boss Dirk Hacker confirmed when I met him to drive a prototype last summer, more of this car's weight gain is actually from structural reinforcements than from electric motors and batteries.

Although at least some of it must be from LED lighting features. Crikey, there are a lot of those and they're not subtle. The M5 has what BMW calls its 'interaction bar' – a strip of fairly unlovely plastic running across the breadth of the fascia, which lights up in a colour determined by your selected driving mode. It adopts special illumination skits, for instance, when you engage your hazard warning lights. At one moment, it's bile green; and then neon red, with BMW M tricolour colouring at its middle, when you move into Sport driving mode.

It wants your attention, basically – a lot. And that's in stark contrast to the ambient lighting in the Panamera, which is gentle and inset into folds in the fascia so that it shines soft, reflected light into the cabin, as if into some expensive penthouse kitchen.

Which looks the more convincingly expensive? It depends on taste, a bit, but if you have much of that, I'd like to think you'd prefer the Porsche.

The BMW's cabin is the more spacious of the two,

The Panamera's optional Active Ride system, with its 'live' body posture adjustment, is great at a moderately brisk pace, but the extra load it can put through the tyres and suspension when really pressing on can begin to become counterproductive.

Panamera is intuitive and agile on such roads, managing its weight well

M5 can also be agile, but all too often feels leaden and lacking in fluency

“The influence of these cars’ electric motors is to give them Herculean, cliff-edge torque”

though – not least because the Panamera has the lower hip point and more sloping roofline, but also because the M5 is clearly the wider car.

If this were a test of extra-practical and versatile fast wagons, namely an M5 Touring and a Panamera Sport Turismo, I suspect that the BMW’s bigger back seats and boot would give it a decisive edge over the Porsche for usability. It’s not, though, and that’s because you can’t get a Panamera Sport Turismo any more. Porsche axed it with the car’s 2024 facelift. And saloon versus ‘saloon’ (the Panamera is actually more like a big hatchback), the Porsche’s more accessible boot might well more than make up for in cargo practicality what it gives up to the BMW in terms of second-row space. Here, maybe bigger doesn’t necessarily also mean more usable.

The Panamera certainly has the more convincing, consistently expensive-feeling, luxury-grade interior – and the lower-couched, though slightly smaller, driver’s seat. Its operating concept is less weighed down by the onslaught of mode selection than the M5’s. It offers simpler, easier routes to switch off the ADAS features that are most likely to irk.

Settling into the Porsche’s driver’s seat, you know instinctively what its priorities are and you needn’t take long tuning the car to suit your own mood and journey. In the BMW – with a smorgasbord of options to puzzle through (M mode, powertrain mode, damping mode, steering mode, gearbox setting, driveline torque distribution mode, stability control level… the list goes on) – you could spend days experimenting, just as I did, and still feel little the wiser.

THE FINAL ROUND

These winding, steep, bumpy and variously narrow mountain roads are a tough test of a big, fast saloon car. But they waste no time at all in revealing what ‘good’ feels like when it comes to keeping one within the borders of its lane and primed for the moment when the vista opens in front of you, and you can feel – for a few, eye-opening seconds, at least – what 700 electrically assisted horsepower feels like.

The horses aren’t really what you notice, though. Rather, the influence of these cars’ electric motors is to give each of them Herculean, cliff-edge torque. So – much as you might indulge yourself with them anyway, just because – three downshifts and a blast to the redline just aren’t required to make these cars explode forwards. One casual flick of your left index finger and a deep squeeze of your right foot will do it.

What the M5 has and the Panamera lacks is ▸

"At that point, hitting the accelerator feels like a crime against topography"

Like other M cars, the M5 comes with M1 and M2 keys on the steering boss for quick-fire drive mode switching – though, on ours, only M1 was actually working. Here's hoping that was a software glitch and not BMW's latest subscription feature.

◄ a dedicated two-speed gearbox for the electric motor, multiplying the torque that it puts into the mechanical driveline. It certainly feels marginally the more brutish car when picking up on a hair trigger from bumbling-level revs, but only in as much as sprinter Maurice Greene was usually a slightly faster starter than Linford Christie right on the official's gun.

Both cars are 'big units' and both will take off at such a rate and with such little need for preparation that it makes rather a mockery of the inclusion of their high-response 'nuclear buttons'. In the M5 you enter 'boost' mode through a long pull on the downshift paddle, and in the Panamera you press the central button on the wheel-mounted driving mode selector – in both cases, to get the car's combustion engine, gearbox, electric motor and power electronics all set to 'DEFCON 1'. At that point, hitting the accelerator feels a little like a crime against topography.

So, yes, both cars are wickedly, monstrously fast. And neither, importantly, ever seems to get to a point where its battery is depleted, its electric motor neutered, and its V8 engine left with excess ballast and no back-up. They both have performance so indefatigable, responsive and outright potent as to leave the vast majority of it untapped 95% of the time, which itself perhaps doesn't make either of them as exciting to drive as they might be if they were – whisper it – actually a bit slower.

But the M5 and Panamera aren't so hard to separate for their ride and handling. It's impossible to say if the BMW's weight really is the decisive factor here, but to me its size is at least as important – and likewise, its particular tuning.

The M5 just feels rather wantonly burly and big – wide and substantial in its footprint, firm and steadfastly level in its bodily responses, quite heavy and sometimes a little recalcitrant and leaden in its control feedback. It's just a bit of a beast.

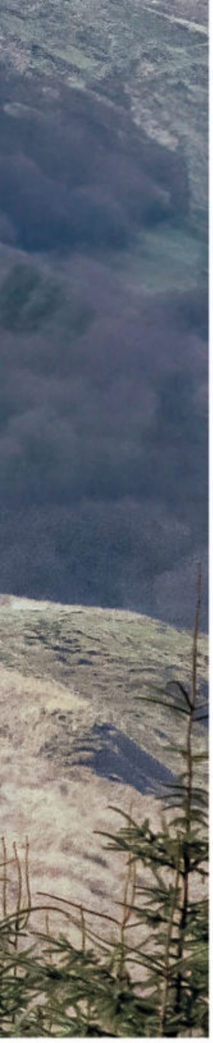
Against all of that, the agility and balance it can generate comes as all the more of a surprise when it does materialise – and it arrives all right. The M5 can grip and rotate when it wants to. But it's all thanks to some quite unyielding anti-roll bar settings, which rob the car of fluency on uneven surfaces and can make it slightly reactive and sensitive to camber.

The Panamera simply has the knack of marshalling and managing its weight more nonchalantly. Perhaps its active anti-roll bars help it here, or the greater range of adjustability of its air springs, or the greater experience Porsche has with four-wheel steering. But the Panamera just gets into, through and out of corners with so much less effort and it can be placed with so much more intuitive confidence. It finds its line sooner, stays on it more dependably, thanks to more pliant ride rates, and feels even more naturally agile than the BMW but supple and fluent with it.

If I'm honest, I expected this contest to be won by the least worst electrified super-saloon – the one whose size and bulk felt least exposed by the bumps, grates, kerbs, narrowness and cambers of some of Wales's most unsympathetic stretches of mountain blacktop.

But while the BMW has struggled and floundered here and there, making something of a straitjacket out of its 700bhp as often as making hay with it, the Porsche has proven surprisingly dynamically versatile. It has shown that when it comes to making really big driver's cars, the M division's problem might not be mass per se – but just how cleverly it can make the kilos melt away when called to. **A**

2ND Doesn't want for hot-rod performance drama, dynamic configurability, outright grip or brutal pace but makes little attempt to hide its bulk.



M5 is roomier but also the wider car – and harder to thread along tight roads

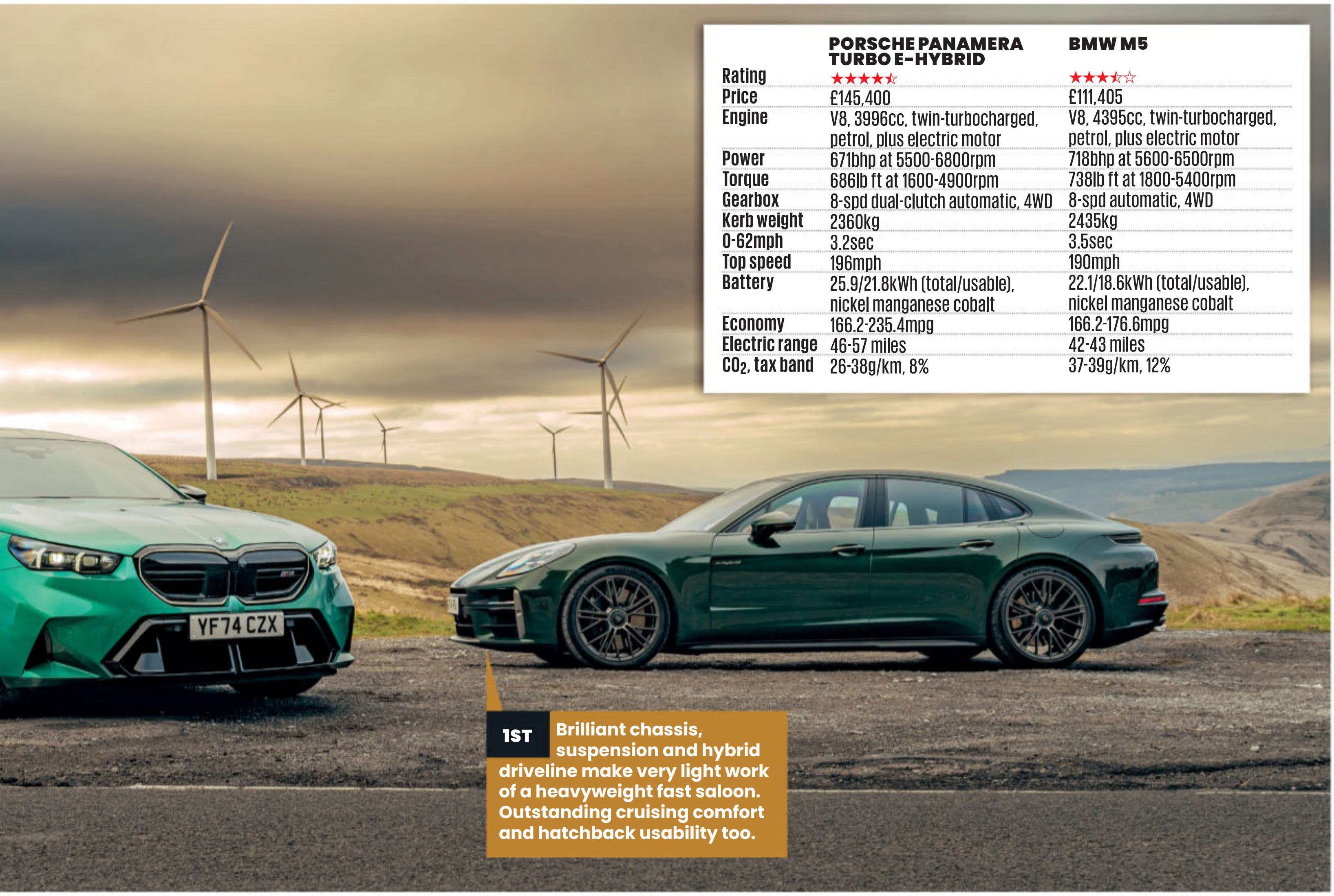
Panamera has a lower, sportier vantage point and feels classier

HAS BMW MISSED AN OPPORTUNITY?

Leave them on a high, as the old theatre saying goes. I can't help thinking BMW should have heeded this advice after rolling out the old M5 CS a few years ago. Try as I might, I can't shake this sublime super-saloon from my mind and its brilliance seems to shine ever brighter in my memory after each run in the latest M5. It's impossible to avoid the conclusion that BMW hit its internally combusted fast four-door peak with that final iteration of the M-infused F80-generation car. By comparison, the new hybrid M5 feels over-wrought (and overweight), as though it's clinging too hard to the past while also trying to embrace an electrified future.

So there's a sense that BMW should have ended the ICE M5 bloodline with the CS, and then gone for bold with an M-developed i5. After all, the Hyundai Ioniq 5 N shows that being a true driver's car has nothing to do with what's under the bonnet. The original E28-gen M5 was the super-saloon pioneer, so perhaps now should have been the time for BMW to reinvent the sector it created.

JAMES DISDALE



	PORSCHE PANAMERA TURBO E-HYBRID	**BMW M5**
Rating	★★★★⯪	★★★⯪☆
Price	£145,400	£111,405
Engine	V8, 3996cc, twin-turbocharged, petrol, plus electric motor	V8, 4395cc, twin-turbocharged, petrol, plus electric motor
Power	671bhp at 5500-6800rpm	718bhp at 5600-6500rpm
Torque	686lb ft at 1600-4900rpm	738lb ft at 1800-5400rpm
Gearbox	8-spd dual-clutch automatic, 4WD	8-spd automatic, 4WD
Kerb weight	2360kg	2435kg
0-62mph	3.2sec	3.5sec
Top speed	196mph	190mph
Battery	25.9/21.8kWh (total/usable), nickel manganese cobalt	22.1/18.6kWh (total/usable), nickel manganese cobalt
Economy	166.2-235.4mpg	166.2-176.6mpg
Electric range	46-57 miles	42-43 miles
CO_2, tax band	26-38g/km, 8%	37-39g/km, 12%

1ST Brilliant chassis, suspension and hybrid driveline make very light work of a heavyweight fast saloon. Outstanding cruising comfort and hatchback usability too.

Buy low, cell high

There are some great used electric car deals to be had at the moment – and cheap prices don't mean exhausted batteries. **VICKY PARROTT** explains how to get a good 'un

PEUGEOT
e-208
GT
RE70 VLP
LEAF
EJ70 YMD
FG21 AZX

It's been a rollercoaster for the used EV market over the past few years. In the aftermath of the Covid pandemic and the following chip crisis restricting the supply of new cars, some used EVs were commanding more than their original list prices. But with a much broader array of EVs going on sale, decent availability and widespread uncertainty about EVs, prices slid dramatically. Indeed, data from market analyst Cap HPI shows that by September 2024, a three-year-old EV was some 8.5% cheaper to buy than a petrol car of equivalent age and mileage.

However, that trend is now changing again. In the latter half of 2024, used EV values stabilised and actually rose very slightly against falling used ICE car values. And the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders recorded more than 53,400 used electric car sales in the third quarter of 2024, a rise of 57% on the same period in 2023, so the lower prices are certainly driving demand.

This of course is either terrible or brilliant news, depending on whether you're selling or buying. But regardless of this mercurial market, there has never been such a great variety of used EVs at such low prices, so now is a superb time to buy before those prices rise any further.

ELECTRIC VEHICLE EXPERT

EV specialist dealers are becoming more common, if you want extra peace of mind

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR WHEN BUYING A USED EV

The golden rules for buying a used EV are much the same as for a used ICE car: checking for even gaps and matching paint across all the panels for signs of accident damage, reading its previous MOT test reports and running thorough checks on its history for finance, theft or other misdemeanours. All of that still stands.

Right, now for the big thing: the battery. This is what worries most buyers. We all know that batteries degrade over time and usage, yet very few EVs offer a battery health readout on the dashboard. We would be the first to point out to legislators that a clear battery health readout would be very simple for manufacturers to provide and should be mandated in order to improve buyer confidence. There's no reason why checking battery life on your EV shouldn't be just as simple as checking the battery life on your phone. But, frustratingly, it's not. And it's understandable why that makes people edgy about buying a used EV.

The thing to remember is that EV battery longevity is very good these days, and as a rough guide you should expect one (regardless of whether it uses nickel-manganese-cobalt or lithium-iron-phosphate chemistry) to lose roughly 1.6% to 2.0% of capacity each year.

You can buy OBD-port readers that you can plug into an EV in order to get a read on its battery health, but even that can be a bit inaccurate, as it's affected by the battery's ▸

The best short-range EVs

Short-range EVs can be a hard sell. There's enough concern about range as it is, so a used EV that had a real-world range of only around 100 miles in the first place is… well, suboptimal. Yet a huge number of motorists could live with one very easily while seldom needing to rapid-charge, especially as so many small-battery EVs spend their lives as second cars for local trips.

More than that, having an EV with a smaller battery and using its full potential is a much more environmental choice than having one with an additional 30kWh of battery that does little more than stave off unnecessary range anxiety. Of course these cars only suit certain lifestyles, but if yours is one of them, you can get a serious bargain.

We haven't forgotten the brilliant, tech-filled Honda E or the fun Mini Electric: these are well-known short-rangers, and there are cheaper options if you look a little harder. So here's our pick of the bargain short-range EVs.

VOLKSWAGEN E-UP

PRICE £6000-£17,000
WLTP RANGE 162 miles
ESTIMATED REAL RANGE 100-140 miles

The electric Up is a delightfully straightforward car, surprisingly spacious inside and joyous to thread through town. The original model had an 18.7kWh battery and an official range of 83 miles, then the later model got 162 miles from a 32kWh pack. So you have the option of cheaper used examples from £6000 if you can live with a real-world 50-60 miles, or pricier ones will do more than 100 miles pretty easily and are still great value. We found a 2021 32kWh e-Up with 25,000 miles for just under £10,000.

NISSAN LEAF

PRICE £2000-£7000
WLTP RANGE 109-155 miles (NEDC)
ESTIMATED REAL RANGE 50-90 miles

It's not at all glamorous, but the original Leaf is a bit of a legend, despite its unavoidable dowdiness, because it's comfortable, it's roomy and it goes on forever. The Leaf went through a number of updates: very early examples will do only around 50-60 miles, post-2013 facelift cars will go a bit farther and later 30kWh models will manage more like 70-90 miles in everyday use. We found a 2016 Tekna with the 30kWh battery, all the kit you will want and 76,000 miles on the clock for just £4890.

MAZDA MX-30

PRICE £11,000-£17,000
WLTP RANGE 124 miles
ESTIMATED REAL RANGE 80-100 miles

The MX-30 has already become something of a forgotten oddity after not even four years on sale. Rear-hinged back doors, a cork-finished interior, cramped rear seats but a surprisingly big boot… It's weird, but it's a very capable school-run car and local commuter, and you can get one that still looks and feels virtually brand new for a fantastic price. We found a 2021 First Edition in metallic red with 23,000 miles under its wheels for just £11,990.

◂ temperature at the time you take the reading, whether it has been fully cycled prior to testing and the OBD device's own vagaries.

It's still absolutely worth doing if you're confident enough to take a device along when viewing a car you're considering, but even better advice is to buy from a reputable dealer who is happy to provide a detailed report on the car's battery health.

As a rough guide for battery health and range potential, you can of course go by the range readout on the car's dash. Bear in mind that it will be affected by how the car has been driven previously, and some models are rather optimistic when fully charged (early Stellantis EVs are particularly guilty of this).

Going by the car's long-term efficiency and calculating range from that tends to give a more realistic average real-world range. Owners' clubs are also a great place to ask for feedback on a used EV's realistic range.

If battery health is a concern, then a lower-mileage EV that hasn't been rapid-charged too frequently is likely to be the best choice, but don't discount high-mileage cars, because you may be pleasantly surprised by the battery health and real-world range even on a well-used EV.

Indeed, I drove a nine-year-old, 260,000-mile Tesla Model S that still had 84% of its original battery capacity remaining despite a life spent at Superchargers (Autocar, 6 November 2024).

So don't feel that you have to stick with low-mileage or younger EVs; just look for one that has a realistic range that suits your lifestyle.

Martin Miller of EV Experts, a specialist dealership in Surrey, points out that heating systems are another area worth checking on a used EV: "The air-con and heating systems are 400V, so to put a new air-con pump in an EV can cost £1000. We recently paid £2200 for a heating element on a Jaguar I-Pace. It's one area that can be very expensive."

Suspension wear is something else to look out for, especially on higher-mileage cars: "An EV is still a car, that means that miles do matter. Although not in the same way as an ICE car, where the engine and gearbox are subject to wear each mile, you still need to look for wear in the suspension and braking systems."

Listen out for clunks and creaks from suspension – especially as EVs are heavier than equivalent ICE cars so can wear suspension parts a touch faster. Brake pads often last far longer on EVs than on ICE cars, given the presence of regenerative braking systems, but pads should be a routine check on any used car purchase regardless of age, mileage and power source. Ditto the tyres, of course.

In short, the options out there for those buying a used EV are better than ever. Just try to buy from a reputable dealer who knows what they're talking about and can provide a thorough battery health report. Make sure to look for a car that offers at least 10-15% more real-world range than you routinely need and a used EV needn't be a scary prospect. 🅰

CHARGING
75 miles
38%
1hr 13mins

Multiply the car's average miles per kWh by its usable battery capacity to get an idea of its real-world range

LA22 WNF
GY63 XLJ

"Don't feel that you have to stick with low-mileage or younger EVs"

The best of the rest

Most motorists are shy of short-range electric cars, and it's not hard to see why. With so many new electric cars having arrived in the past few years, and with longer-range EVs now commonplace, the options on the used market have never been so good. Here are some examples.

POLESTAR 2

PRICE £19,000-£40,000
WLTP RANGE 293-406 miles
ESTIMATED REAL RANGE 240-350 miles

This saloon-shaped hatchback looks great, is good to drive, has one of the best infotainment systems out there and is a solidly desirable and effective long-distance EV. An update in 2023 brought bigger batteries for a range of more than 400 miles, but earlier cars are now down to £20,000, even with a real-world range of over 300 miles. We found a 2021 Long Range Single Motor, which will do 280-310 miles in the real world, with 40,000 miles on the odo for £21,000.

CITROEN E-C4

PRICE £12,000-£36,000
WLTP RANGE 213-260 miles
ESTIMATED REAL RANGE 150-220 miles

Okay, so it looks peculiar, but the electric version of the C4 is a cushy delight. Softly sprung, roomy inside and with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, plus proper climate control buttons, so you don't often have to rely too heavily on the woeful infotainment system. Earlier examples will do around 150-180 miles per charge in the real world, while the post-update 54kWh models will manage 200-230 miles. We found one of the smaller-battery cars, a 2021 Shine, with 31,000 miles driven for £12,000.

CUPRA BORN

PRICE £17,000-£40,000
WLTP RANGE 264-342 miles
ESTIMATED REAL RANGE 200-300 miles

The Born has been offered with a couple of battery options: familiar 58kWh and 77kWh packs from the first wave of Volkswagen's MEB EVs. It's still one of our favourite EVs, because there's a hot hatch edge to the Spaniard – you certainly notice the difference between the Born and its Volkswagen ID 3 sibling – plus more style swagger than its rivals. You can get an excellent deal if you buy used, too: we found a 2022 58kWh V2 with 27,000 miles on the clock for just under £21,000.

Check the discs and pads, as EVs use friction braking far less than ICE cars

How to become an *apex* predator

How easy is it to drive a supercar quickly on track – with little to no experience? We dispatch **MURRAY SCULLION** in an MC20 to see

PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

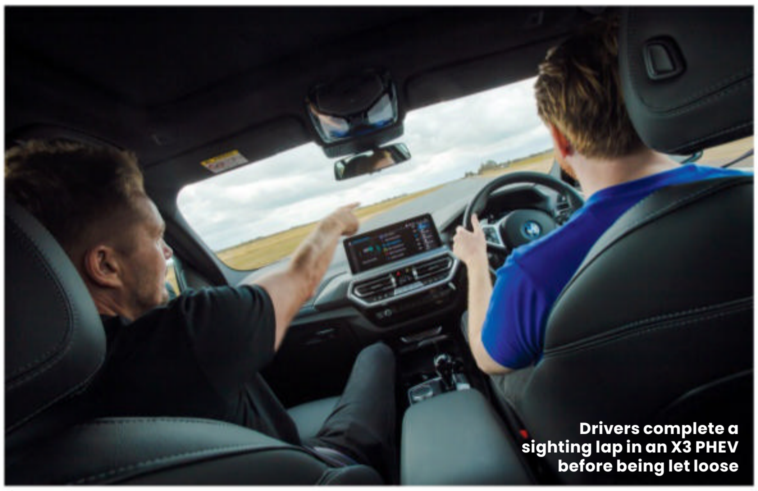
Like most people attending their first session of track driving tuition, I have fallen at the first hurdle. Well, not so much the first hurdle. This is more like not doing up my laces properly.

Driving position, vision, braking. These three fundamentals are at the forefront of what I learn at Bedford Autodrome on a slightly wet and greasy Tuesday. And it is the driving position where I let myself down.

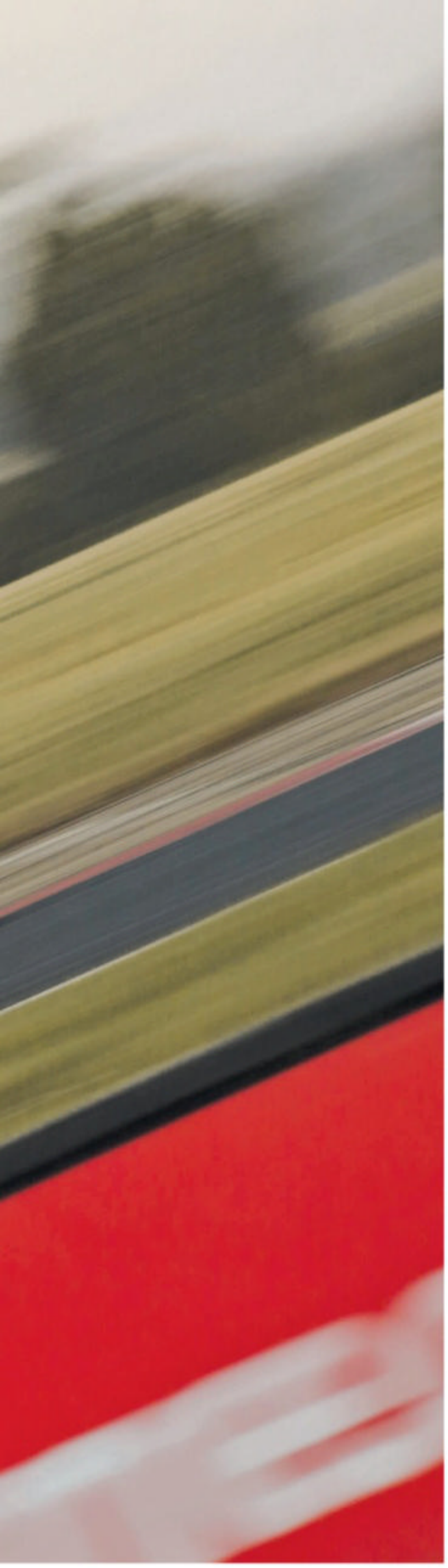
"Typically, most men tend to sit far too far back," Christian Vann tells me. Vann is PalmerSport's chief instructor, a former Le Mans racer and a very patient man. Being too far back leads to an outstretched leg position, which doesn't provide optimal power from your quads and hamstrings when braking. Also, in the event of a crash, your leg will go through your pelvis if it's outstretched. Which, I'm assured, is not ideal.

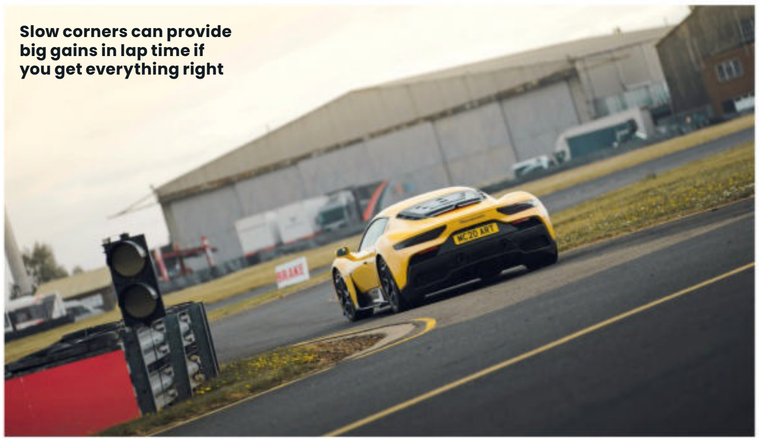
This might all seem a bit dry considering the pictures in front of you are of a mid-engined Italian supercar. But the fundamentals, the boring stuff, are what make the biggest differences when piloting something like a Maserati MC20 at 200mph.

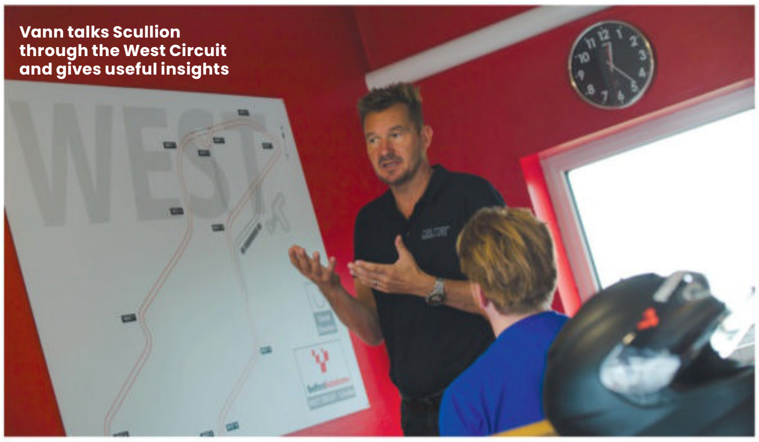
Now that I can actually sit correctly, I should probably start driving. We're here to find out how



Drivers complete a sighting lap in an X3 PHEV before being let loose




Slow corners can provide big gains in lap time if you get everything right



Vann talks Scullion through the West Circuit and gives useful insights

What's the difference between race cars and supercars on the track?

CHRISTIAN VANN, CHIEF INSTRUCTOR, PALMERSPORT
"The biggest difference between a race car with full aero and slick tyres and a supercar isn't the 0-100mph sprint. It's 0-100-0mph.

"You won't find too much difference in terms of acceleration and straight-line speed. In fact, an MC20 might even be quicker than a GT car because it has very little drag.

"But it's the stopping power that really makes the difference. Race cars have stiffer springs, a roll-cage to improve stiffness, adjustable front and rear anti-roll bars, and four-way adjustable race dampers. Then there's aero – floors, rear wings, front splitters. They all control the stiffness of the car. And everything works together to improve the car's ability to slow down."

easy it is for a supercar newcomer to extract performance from one on a track, but I warm up in a BMW X3 PHEV on Bedford's West Circuit.

A few laps of the 1.8-mile 12-corner circuit fly by, and before I know it I'm out in the Maserati. I'm fortunate to have had the car for a couple of days prior to this track session, so I know my way around it. But I have driven on only a handful of tracks, and I have driven only a handful of supercars, and I have never, ever combined the two.

My first few laps are taken fairly gingerly. But I eventually get into the swing of it. The night before, I casually looked up the track's layout on my phone (I suspect Lewis Hamilton does the same thing before races), which revealed I'd be tackling the shortest of the four possible configurations. Despite this, I feel a bit lost at times. Corner 11, the penultimate one, is long, sweeping and *so* wide.

Four laps sail by and it's time for some feedback. "There are probably more good points than I was expecting," says Vann. Damning with faint praise there, but I'll let him continue.

"Your steering technique was absolutely fine," he says. "But you need to use a bit more of the width of the track, which will help smoothen out that throttle."

I couldn't agree with him more. I did feel lost and I did feel unsmooth. On the drive to Bedford, the MC20 felt like it delivered its power pretty broadly. But on track, with the adrenaline racing through me and the gearchanges coming quickly, I've found it all becomes a bit peaky.

Out for round two. Vann's pep talk has given me a real spring in my step and, with a bit more confidence in me now, I feel much more at home using the track's full width and I use the accelerator and brakes more gradually and less like an on/off switch.

We come in for a bit of lunch. Vann notes that I have relatively good car control. I look up at social media executive Jonathan Bryce and snapper Jack Harrison, who are with me today. Both pretend they didn't hear it, but they did.

I finish up some couscous and discover that it is now raining heavily. Damn. We hang around for a while and it calms down. Then we head outside. Vann says a greasy track can be even trickier than a wet one. He explains the benefit of shifting up early to quell the 538lb ft of turbocharged torque and we take to the track.

His words fail to make much of an impression on my prefrontal cortex as I nail it in second gear and ceremoniously feel the back end snap. I catch it, though having dialled the drive mode back to Sport means the DSC will have helped.

Eventually, it's time for the final debrief. "Where I thought that you had made the most improvement was in braking, in terms of your initial hit on the brakes – getting the car slowed down," says Vann. "The main area for improvement, and I'm sort of getting into some more advanced levels now, is actually how you release the brake pedal.

"It's one thing going on the brakes and slowing the car down, and that's kind of obvious, but actually, how you release the brakes plays a big part in the handling of the car."

Sitting here now at my desk, I can understand the merits of not simply braking as hard as possible. But on-track Murray did not see it like that.

Tedious insurance reasons meant I couldn't time myself. But Vann reckons I'm around 12 seconds per lap faster after the tuition. He says improvements can be even larger among people coming from a lower base level. His words, not mine.

The secret to supercar driving? Supercars are just like regular cars. Sorting the basics – seating position, vision, looking through a corner, braking in a straight line, straightening the steering wheel before applying power – in any car will make a difference. It's just that there's more at stake and there are bigger gains to be made in a supercar.

Braking is about finesse too; it's not simply a case of hitting the pedal hard

THANKS TO JONATHAN PALMER, PALMERSPORT

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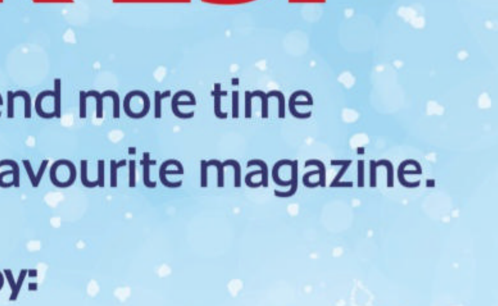

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Scott

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LIVING WITH A...

Where our long-term test cars have been and what they've done

“Diesels remain a terrific option for a certain use case”

FIRST REPORT

SKODA SUPERB ESTATE

Captain Sensible swaggers in after a rare five-star road test verdict

WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To see whether this new big estate really is a flawless family hauler

Of the handful of five-star road test verdicts awarded by Autocar in recent years, none surprised me as much as that for the latest Skoda Superb Estate. The thing is, I'm not really sure why.

Of course, our testers evaluate cars on a fitness-for-purpose basis, on which this big wagon has always scored highly, offering tremendous value for money, pleasant enough driving, reasonable comfort and more luggage space than your local Big Yellow Self Storage facility, but a big, diesel-engined Skoda estate still seemed like an unlikely entry into the rarefied air of “brilliant, unsurpassed; all but flawless”.

Well, I suppose the brilliance of a car such as the Superb Estate only really shines through when you use it every day for everything life and work might throw at you – and so that's exactly what I'm going to be doing for the next few months.

This Superb is classed as a new model generation (the fourth), although its underpinnings – the Volkswagen Group MQB platform – and powertrains remain familiar. The key point is that it was developed alongside the new Passat but with Skoda rather than Volkswagen taking the development lead, which explains why the few compromises that previously affected the Superb have been overcome this time around.

Speccing our car was easy: I'll have it in the exact five-star form from the road test, please. Estate body, 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbo diesel engine and mid-range SE L trim. The only real variety comes from the options list: Graphite Grey metallic paint rather than Ice Tea Yellow, an 18in spacesaver spare wheel (because potholes) and an electric towbar, just in case I suddenly get bored of writing and decide to open a burger van.

As such, this car costs £41,675. Skoda is definitively no longer a budget brand, but given the Superb's size, that still represents tremendous value for money to me.

Being absolutely honest, had I been speccing a Superb for myself, I would have been reluctant to select the diesel. But while diesels are in seemingly inexorable decline, they remain a terrific option for a certain use case. Which perhaps explains why there seems to be something of a mini-renaissance of firms offering diesels, particularly within the Volkswagen Group.

There's even a mini-renaissance of diesels on our fleet: magazine editor Rachel Burgess recently took delivery of an Audi A3 Sportback (Autocar, 31 December 2024) powered by the same 148bhp engine as this Superb. The two are similarly priced, too: it will be interesting to see if the Audi hatchback's premium sheen or the Skoda estate's practicality wins out.

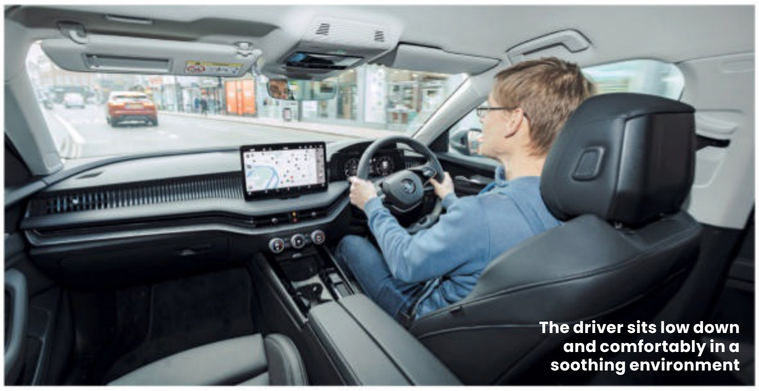
In terms of ensuring the Superb gets seen in an ideal light, I have several long journeys lined up and a conga line of colleagues with large items to move forming behind me.

And that should be a treat: during road testing, the Superb managed 765 miles on a single tank of fuel, the sort of number that's

SECOND OPINION

Ease of use has long been one of Skoda's brand pillars, earning it a loyal following. This latest Superb's silly huge boot and 765-mile range are testament to that. It has also tended to result in cheap-feeling cabins, but not so here. Modern screens and traditional switchgear are combined for an environment that feels, well, superb. **WR**

It has grown to 4902m long but width remains unproblematic at 1849mm



The driver sits low down and comfortably in a soothing environment

Try putting this much stuff in your average family crossover

incomprehensible to someone who has been running electric cars in recent years. This is actually a car for that person who claims they can't buy an EV just in case they need to drive from Inverness to Truro without stopping.

When said apocryphal driver does reach Truro, they will also be able to buy all the Cornish pasties. This estate's boot capacity is a whopping 690 litres even before you fold down the rear seats, and the boxy shape makes it really practical to use.

How big is 690 litres in reality? Let me give you an example. The Superb arrived with me shortly before Christmas, so one of my first journeys in it was to visit family in the West Country for the holidays (yes, there was some Chris Rea…). When I loaded up the car for the trip, my bags of presents didn't even fill half the boot. What I had thought was a festive bounty suddenly made me feel like Scrooge McDuck.

At least I was a comfortable miser: on initial acquaintance, the interior of the Superb is glorious. It being a traditional estate, the driving position is nice and low, and while the infotainment touchscreen is big (13in), it's well placed and nicely complemented by physical switchgear. In particular, I'm a big fan of the multifunctional Smart Dials, which control various infotainment and heating controls.

Undoubtedly, the Superb is a large, long car. When parked, the rear of the boot probably sits in a separate postcode from the bonnet. But it's still relatively narrow and is proving surprisingly easy to navigate. I can even fit it snugly into the ridiculously small parking spaces outside my 1960s house.

My initial impressions are good, then, but that isn't really a surprise: this is a five-star car, after all. Hopefully I won't find any hidden gremlins in the coming months that will give me pause to reconsider that verdict.

JAMES ATTWOOD

TEST DATA

SKODA SUPERB 2.0 TDI ESTATE SE L

Price new £39,705 **Price as tested** £41,675 **Options** Graphite Grey metallic paint £680, spacesaver spare wheel £185, electric towbar £1105 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 55.6mpg (WLTP)

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GENESIS G80 EV

Chauffeur for Cropley – and it's a limo up to his exacting standards

MILEAGE 5244 **WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT** Does being the basis for an ICE model compromise the G80 as an EV?

I had been driving about happily in the electric Genesis G80 for three months before it occurred to me to do the obvious thing: test it from the back seat. I mean, here's a vehicle that's more than five metres long and in whose styling half the car world seems to see echoes of Bentley Flying Spur, yet all I had done was punt it about as any other commuter car.

The wrong was righted recently when we decided that the G80's generous size, quiet ride and decent winter range (260-270 miles, if you're sensible) made it ideal for a reporting job that needed several participants and a suitable place for them to shelter while a photography session was being held in particularly bleak conditions. I made a point of not driving and always travelling in the back, and it was a very pleasant experience.

For those who usually drive, rear travel by saloon is rarely fun. The rear door aperture is never as conveniently shaped as the front one, so getting in gracefully takes practice; leg and foot room are often insufficient; the front head restraints often restrict your view; the window sills tend to be high; the seat is often set low, so that the maker won't be criticised for providing insufficient head room; much of the time, the pervading road noise means you can't easily hear conversations in the front (if you want to); and the ventilation is often second-class.

In the G80, most of these drawbacks are swept away. Getting in is easy; the rear seat cushion is plush; you sit high enough to see; you can hear conversations in the front clearly; and you have excellent command of your own ventilation.

Travel like this for a while and you suddenly realise why five-metre cars have a place and a relevance, especially when they're as frugal with the electrons as this one is. The G80's big flaw (in electric form, at least) is a shortage of boot space: on our journey, even a pared-down collection of photographer's kit left precious little room for anything else. But if you can live with that, you've got a good car.

STEVE CROPLEY

LOVE IT

FAB FASCIA

There's a logic and a quality to Genesis's switch and screen layouts that are simply better than the rest.

LOATHE IT

CHEAPO GRILLE

It's easy to recognise and nicely shaped but recognisably plastic from 100 yards, which is a shame.

TEST DATA

GENESIS ELECTRIFIED G80

Price new £69,905 **Price as tested** £84,265 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Range** 270 miles **Economy** 3.3mpkWh **Last seen** 31.12.24

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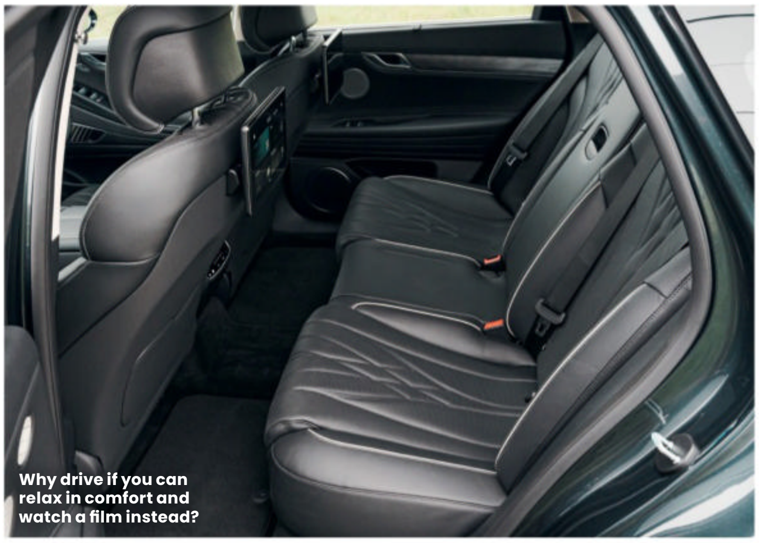


Why drive if you can relax in comfort and watch a film instead?

MERCEDES-AMG CLE 53

Staffers share their appreciation for the big coupé – and their concerns

MILEAGE 2111
WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To generate a progress report on the evolution of the old-school Merc coupé

“That's not the CLE AMG, is it? Oh my God!”

“That is a truly lovely car, mate. Beautiful.”

“Love that. Wow. That's the nicest car I've seen in ages.”

All three of those interactions with complete strangers happened within 48 hours of each other, and they aren't uncommon when I'm out and about in the CLE 53.

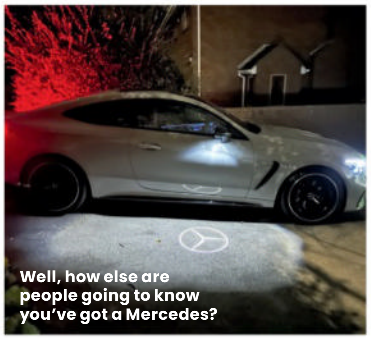
Maybe it's just how vast the Mercedes range is and how hard it can be to keep up with the flow of new models, but the specialness of the CLE, particularly in AMG flavour, had passed me by a bit. This really is a stunner.

Usually you have to be in exotica like an Aston Martin or a Bentley for a big coupé to turn heads in such a way. I can't recall a BMW, an Audi or even a Mercedes for that matter (this side of an SLS or AMG GT, at least) garnering such a reaction.

When you drive past people, you can often track their heads following the car as it goes by, and a glance in the rear-view mirror might reveal them still looking.

And good on 'em. I would, too. The more time I spend in the CLE 53, the more I like it and the more special it feels in every way: looks, performance, handling, interior theatre, big boot.

I was fortunate enough to spend a week in a Bentley Continental GT in the US recently, and the CLE 53 feels far closer to that lineage than a C-Class.



Well, how else are people going to know you've got a Mercedes?

Such trips have meant I've been sharing the CLE 53 love around the Autocar team.

Digital editor Murray Scullion drove it back to back with an old CLK 63 AMG Black Series for an upcoming feature. He came back smitten, too, and felt it was in no way overshadowed by what many consider to be the zenith of AMGs.

LOVE IT

PUDDLE LAMPS
If we were to hand out an award for the biggest and brightest puddle lamps, the CLE 53 would win hands down.

LOATHE IT

KERBABLE ALLOYS
I've nicked them twice now, despite being careful. They stick out so far from the tyre. Closest I've come to crying in this job.

3.0-litre straight six wasn't humiliated by 6.2-litre V8, amazingly

“I thought there were striking similarities between the pair,” he told me. “Both feel heavy and mechanical. Both have huge torque available seemingly at any speed in any gear. Both have huge road presence and brazen soundtracks.

“We borrowed the CLK Black Series from a renowned Mercedes specialist, the SL Shop. What was very telling was that absolutely everyone there loved the CLE.”

Editor-in-chief Steve Cropley, meanwhile, “greatly enjoyed its refined sportiness”, saying: “I loved the steering and firm, flat ride – especially the way it could be quite markedly varied through four settings by a convenient twist control on the steering wheel.”

That controller holds the key to really being able to gel with the car, as associate editor James Attwood found out: “It's a difficult car to adjust to at first, but once you spend a bit of time and work your way through the settings, it opens up. At first it felt a little harsh, but with some fiddling and familiarity it became much easier to enjoy.”

There are further allowances you have to make for the CLE 53, and all borrowers shared similar concerns: you need to get used to the driving position, the sheer size of it (you think a C-Class, due to the name, but it's more E), the poor rear visibility and the massive overhangs when manoeuvring. But once you're settled you can really get to enjoy it.

From the interior, which Attwood said “feels like you would want a luxury Merc coupé to: nicely grand and comfortable”, to the engine, at which deputy editor Felix Page marvelled: “That straight six has to be one of the best all-rounders under the bonnet of any current production car. Composed and manageable at a cruise, quiet at low speeds and delightfully raucous and grunty where space permits.”

That last point was a concern shared by Cropley: “To really get a car like this truly working, you have to drive it pretty hard, which can get rather antisocial unless you choose your test territory carefully. But do this and it's rewarding, for sure.”

Now, can I have the keys back?

MARK TISSHAW

TEST DATA

MERCEDES-AMG CLE 53 4MATIC+ COUPE NIGHT EDITION PREMIUM PLUS
Price new £78,825 **Price as tested** £81,445 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 28.1mpg **Last seen** 4/11.12.24

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VAUXHALL CORSA

Otherwise appealing hybrid springs a nasty surprise

MILEAGE 9631
WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To find out if this supermini still deserves to be a staple of British roads

Life with a Corsa Hybrid so far has been pretty pleasant. It's about as fast as a normal, non-performance small hatchback ought to be, it's economical and it's practical enough for daily life, even when lumbered with a full load of camera equipment. People are complimentary about it, too. A friend even remarked that it's "too nice to be a Vauxhall". A bit unfair to the brand, I think, but no matter.

There is one thing about it that drives me absolutely crazy, though: the ride. I can count on one hand the number of cars I've been in that have dealt with lumps and bumps worse than this, and most of those have been hardcore sports cars.

The primary ride is fine. If you were to drive this Corsa down a perfectly smooth road, you would wonder what I'm on about, as all would be well. The problem is that in Britain, a perfectly smooth road is all but a fantasy. The second the car finds a bump on the surface, you know about it – not from seeing it but from feeling an ungodly crash as you go over it. It can make you feel as if you're driving over a small speed bump when in fact you're merely traversing a small pothole. Even minor bumps – bridge expansion joints on a motorway, for example – send a shock through the car, and genuinely bumpy roads quickly become exceptionally irritating to drive down.

This ride is surely hindered by the big, 17in wheels shod with only 205/45-section rubber, but there's more to it than that. I got hold of a 100bhp unelectrified manual Corsa (in the one-step-down GS trim) with the same wheel and tyre combination and took the two cars on an identical route along the heavily neglected roads of Poole. The petrol car rode noticeably better, dealing with the bumps fairly well and without most of the crashiness that plagues the hybrid.

Of course, the petrol GS is lighter than the hybrid Ultimate, but only by 100kg or so. Even with a passenger and a boot full of my work gear, it still rode much better than its pricier counterpart.

It feels as if the suspension is sprung much more firmly in the hybrid – too firmly. You would expect it to be more softly sprung to deal with that extra weight, but there's seemingly no need for it to be at the level it is.

This seems to be a recurring theme with Stellantis products: colleagues have reported similar discrepancies between electrified and non-electrified products from other brands in the conglomerate.

My Corsa comparison test revealed something else interesting, too. The nine-mile route I drew up took me from my home in the suburbs right into the congested centre of town, via some short stretches of dual carriageway and a number of faster roads too. Traffic levels were about the same on each run (there was a one-minute difference in times). The petrol recorded a 42.7mpg average, the hybrid 45.5mpg. An improvement, sure, but is 2.8mpg around town worth spending more than £2000 extra to achieve?

It was a similar story on longer drives: the petrol typically hovered around the 57mpg mark, the hybrid about 3mpg higher. Again, slightly better, but worth the expense…?
JACK HARRISON

LOVE IT

UPRIGHT SORT
Stiffly sprung suspension means the body control through corners is very solid, with not a lot of roll.

LOATHE IT

KANGAROO CAR
The fixed strength of the regenerative braking is still annoying me no end, as it jerks the car to a halt.

TEST DATA

VAUXHALL CORSA 1.2 TURBO HYBRID 136PS ULTIMATE
Price new £29,030 **Price as tested** £29,630 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 52.3mpg **Last seen** 31.12.24

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE
jack.harrison@haymarket.com

Vauxhall, boring? You don't know what you're talking about…

SNAPSHOTS

ALFA ROMEO GIULIA QUADRIFOGLIO

Mileage 9306 **Last seen** 8.1.25
Boring alert. I realised that most of my Giulia reports have been about exciting drives, general enjoyment and a bit of breaking down. So I figured it was actually worth making my penultimate missive about practicality. Here it is at Asda. As you can see, it took all my Christmas shopping in its boot and fitted in the parking space easily. It's basically a VW Multivan. **MSc**

BMW i5 TOURING

Mileage 12,100 **Last seen** 31.12.24
If you seem tired, the i5 will offer you a pick-me-up: a three-minute routine dropping the temperature, cooling the seats, playing something upbeat on the audio and rolling back the roof blind. The sheer novelty and comedy of it is enough to give you a start. You can decline it if you're actually perfectly awake – and if you are tired, I think a rest stop is a better plan. **MP**

AUDI A3 SPORTBACK

Mileage 701 **Last seen** 31.12.24
Most car speaker systems are perfectly decent to my ears these days. The one in this A3, the first I've tried from Sonos, is no different. As a fan of the firm's home products (I use a Sonos system across multiple rooms), seeing it in the A3 instantly elevated my feelings on the car's overall quality. Such is the power of savvy brand tie-ups. **RB**

USED CARS

HOW TO BUY A TESLA MODEL 3

RIP-ROARING ADVENTURES AWAIT THE 3 MUSKETEERS

You can now join the world's million-plus Model 3 drivers for just £12k

The Tesla Model 3 overcame the stereotypes to prove that EVs could go toe to toe with the very best combustion cars – and range anxiety be damned. Six years on from its UK launch, this sleek saloon still has bags of appeal, thanks to its practical interior, class-leading technology and impressive long-distance credentials.

The Model 3 was the product that Tesla had always wanted to make: a high-volume, low-cost EV that would enable families to wave goodbye to their oil-burning wagon and embrace 'clean' propulsion.

And that prospect has proven hugely appealing: it has found more than a million homes worldwide to date and continues to sell strongly.

Now that prices have tumbled to just £12,000 for earlier examples, it's a great time to snap up an example of this world-changing EV.

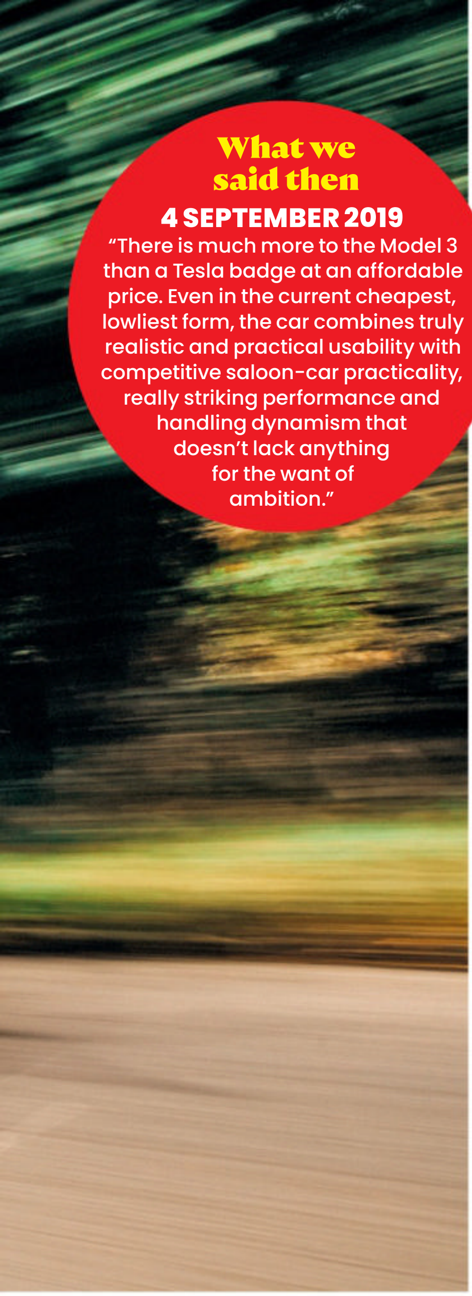
A sub-£15k budget will restrict you to the Standard Range Plus model: it has a 252bhp motor for the rear wheels and a 50kWh battery that was officially good for 254 miles on a charge from new (but expect more like 200 miles in reality).

Our pick was the 346bhp dual-motor Long Range, which got a larger, 75kWh battery for a 348-mile range. Around 300 miles is more realistic in practice, but that's still good going even today.

Then there's the hopped-up Performance, which sacrificed a bit of range in favour of supercar-aping acceleration: with a 444bhp dual-motor powertrain, it can hit 60mph in a BMW M3-like 3.2sec.

It got bigger brakes, 20in wheels and a dedicated track driving

Interior is ultra-minimal; even the speedometer is on the touchscreen



What we said then

4 SEPTEMBER 2019

"There is much more to the Model 3 than a Tesla badge at an affordable price. Even in the current cheapest, lowliest form, the car combines truly realistic and practical usability with competitive saloon-car practicality, really striking performance and handling dynamism that doesn't lack anything for the want of ambition."

mode too, but while it certainly has whip-crack acceleration, its chassis lacks the finesse to deliver a truly engaging experience. Modifications therefore aren't a bad idea if you're a really keen driver. Specialists such as UK-based Tevo offer pretty transformative brake, wheel and suspension upgrades – although its trick dampers will set you back around £8000.

The Model 3 is quite a stiff-legged and firm-riding car, especially in Performance form. Rolling refinement isn't great and the numb steering provides little feedback, but for mooching around town and punting along rural back roads, it's generally well mannered. The one-pedal driving mode is a nice touch, too.

Tesla fettled the chemistry of its batteries in 2020 to boost official range up to 305, 374 and 340 miles for the three variants.

Another update came in 2021, bringing subtle styling tweaks, a standard heat pump to improve efficiency and a larger (82kWh) battery for the Performance.

There was then a comprehensive update in 2024, but we won't cover those cars here as prices haven't had time to come down yet.

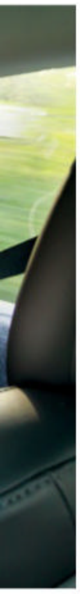
Thanks to Tesla's brilliant Supercharger network, you won't have any issues charging on the go. There are more than 1000 devices dotted around the UK. Most offer speeds of up to 150kW, while newer ones can give you 250kW for a sub-30-minute 10-80% boost. They're a doddle to use: plug the car in and then hit start on the touchscreen or Tesla's smartphone app.

Families will have little trouble using the Model 3 as their main car. It has a practical 425-litre boot, and while its sloping roofline limits rear head room, it's still fairly spacious.

There's plenty of tech wizardry to play with, too: the 15in tablet-like touchscreen even offers streaming and Atari arcade games. The screen is a bit of a swine to use on the move at first – there being no buttons or switches – but it shouldn't take you too long to get used to it.

Combustion-loving EV sceptics are quick to judge the Model 3 for its perceived lack of charisma and questionable build quality. But you will have the last laugh when you fizz past them in smooth, zero-emissions silence.

SAM PHILLIPS



The Model 3 is no 3 Series but is enjoyable to drive in its own particular way

> "Range is up to 340 miles and a Supercharger can boost it from 10-80% in less than 30 minutes"

How to get one in your garage

AN OWNER'S VIEW

OLLIE FROUD

"I've had my 2021 Long Range for six months now, and I love it! I bought it directly from Tesla, which was a great experience, and it has been faultless. I charge it mostly at home overnight, so it's about 2p a mile to run, which is nearly 10 times less than my previous car. Longer journeys are very easy and we've never had to queue for a Supercharger. It's a great all-round family car."

BUYER BEWARE...

■ BATTERY

Degradation is unavoidable, but Tesla claims that after 200,000 miles, the battery in a Long Range car will have lost only 15% of its capacity. Specialist EV dealers like RSEV can carry out checks on the battery to ensure that it's in good order. Stop charging at 80% to boost longevity. Avoid cars that have been left standing, as long idle periods can damage the cells.

■ SOFTWARE

Over-the-air software updates can bring glitches at first. These knock out the touchscreen or stop certain functions from working properly. Make sure the car is fully up to date, and if any problems occur, try rebooting the system by holding the steering wheel buttons until the screen restarts.

■ CHARGING

Make sure the charging port door opens properly via the touchscreen or app. Software glitches can stop it from opening, but there is a manual override. Charging cables can get locked in, so check that you can free it without difficulty. Again, there's a manual release in the boot.

■ BODY

Build quality on some earlier cars isn't great, so check the paintwork, panel gaps and exterior trim for any signs of wear or damage. Misaligned panels can be fixed by Tesla at an annual service. Wind noise is a bugbear, due to poor seals. An aftermarket soundproofing kit is claimed to lessen noise inside the cabin.

■ INTERIOR

Listen out for any squeaks or rattles from interior trim and wear on key touchpoints like the door cappings and steering wheel. Faux leather can also experience discoloration, so be sure to give potential purchases a thorough going over.

ALSO WORTH KNOWING

All cars got a basic warranty of four years or 50,000 miles for manufacturing issues and cosmetic defects. Then there's a separate battery and drive unit warranty, which covers those items for eight years or 100,000 miles on the Standard Range and eight years or 120,000 miles on the Long Range and Performance.

Build quality plagued early cars, so be wary of thick panel gaps and misaligned panels. It did improve over time, though.

Post-2021 cars were made in China. You can tell the difference to an American-made one by the wood veneer interior trim, which runs across the dashboard and into the doors.

HOW MUCH TO SPEND

£12,000-£14,999

Predominantly high-mileage Standard Range cars, with the odd Long Range available. Plenty of pre-facelift examples, some with only one previous owner.

£15,000-£17,999

Mileage and age varies here but more Long Range and Performance cars on offer. Trade sellers dominate.

£18,000-£20,999

Plenty of low-mileage, post-facelift Standard Ranges and reasonably used Long Ranges.

£21,000 AND ABOVE

Very tidy post-facelift cars with reasonable to low mileages. Mainly Long Ranges here.

ONE WE FOUND

TESLA MODEL 3 LONG RANGE, 2021, 54,000 MILES, £20,744

This one-owner car should still have 90% of its original battery capacity. The selling dealer has given it a thorough inspection and says it's in excellent condition. And as a later model, it has the standard heat pump.

My car & I

Loud and proud, seventies-style

He has owned modern classics, including an Alfa Romeo GTV, but this TVR Taimar is Neil Swan's first genuinely classic car. It was built in 1975 and based on the 3000M, so it's powered by a Ford Essex 3.0-litre V6.

The Taimar is a hatchback, which makes it sound practical, but really it just has a hinged glass window over a raised and stretched boot shelf. Indeed, it makes few concessions to practicality, remaining first and foremost a sports car in the finest British tradition: the engine is at the front, its power goes to the rear wheels and the chassis has outriggers supporting a separate body, in this case one made of glass-reinforced plastic. "It's a proper man's car," says Neil – a description that would have gone unremarked back when it was new but raises eyebrows today. "I wanted something noisy. It's not subtle. You buy into it."

He paid £12,000 for it two years ago – not a bad price, since the car itself was in great condition and it included a spare engine, gearbox, differential and wheels. Also bundled in was a full ramp onto which he could drive the car.

"It was great," says Neil. "Usefully higher and a lot more secure than jacking the car up. But I needed the

TVR
MVV 222P

Our cars

A clean, low-mileage, ULEZ-compliant V6 – for £400

BY ALEX WOLSTENHOLME

It turns out that it's still possible to buy a functioning car with an MOT certificate for less than £500.

I may have bought it from a friend's parents' neighbour, but this ULEZ-compliant Jaguar X-Type cost me just £400, complete with six months on the MOT (with only tired suspension parts as advisories) and just 53,000 miles.

From the outside, you can tell it has lived in London's busy suburbs its whole life, but inside it looks almost new, despite the dated grey leather matching the walnut veneer like an original Mercedes-Benz A-Class and a moose test.

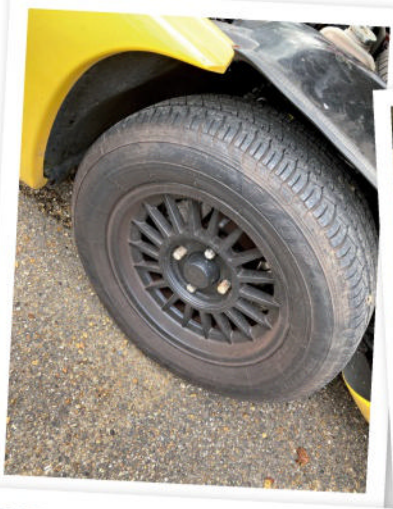
The 2.1-litre petrol V6 is silky smooth (although shockingly averse to making progress), while the suspension is as pliant as almost anything else these days but equally demonstrates how far body control has come in the past 20 years.

The only thing I'm not looking forward to is the running costs. The annual road tax is £415 and the fuel consumption is diabolical. We're talking 16mpg in town and 24mpg on a run.

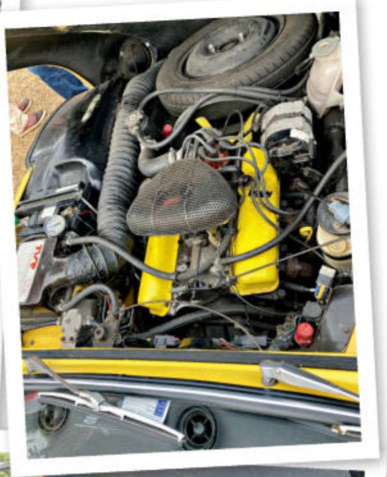
The anachronistic five-speed automatic gearbox working with a complete absence of torque is to blame for this: if you set the cruise control at 70mph, the car will need to kick down to fourth at the slightest incline.

Overall, my new Jag is far from perfect, but you can't argue with £400.

Yes, there are a few scuffs, but it looks fab for the money



Essex's loud bark is matched by fat Dunlops' strong bite



Some wood, some leather and a radio: what more do you want?

money and sold it, which I regret.”

Another pleasant surprise was that the car featured a five-speed ’box, rather than the standard four-speeder. And because the spare was the latter type, Neil sold that too.

“When the owner fired the car up, it was love on first hearing,” says Neil. “From the moment I got it home, it has been a turnkey car: no problems and absolutely perfect. The chap was only selling because he wanted to get into Porsches.”

The M-series was among the first fruits of Martin Lilley's ownership of TVR. The range spanned the 1600M to the 5.0-litre V8-powered 5000M, reserved for the US. There were even turbocharged versions.

The chassis of these cars and the related Taimar were guaranteed against corrosion for five years, and Neil reckons his Taimar's underside is still rust-free today.

His car is reliable too, but since it's his daily driver, it has to be: “I just have to clean the spark plugs regularly, because they get oiled up in the 20mph limits where I live. I tune the Weber carb, which I had rebuilt, every couple of months too; it only requires a turn of a screw. The radiator is a funny shape, so I keep an eye on the temperature.”

Neil found out the hard way that replacement rear windows are plentiful when a man with an axe smashed his (nothing against TVR – the attacker did lots of others, too): “Fortunately, I tracked down a chap who had recently bought a house and found 20 rear windows for the Taimar in a bush at the back of his garden. Unbelievable!”

At least for now the Taimar is a keeper, but looking ahead Neil has his eye on a Porsche. “A 944 or a 924 Turbo, maybe,” he suggests. “They're similar in shape to the TVR but a little more usable. The Taimar is a serious handful in the wet, like only a man's car can be!”

JOHN EVANS

> **“It's a proper man's car. It's not subtle. You buy into it”**

CAUGHT IN THE CLASSIFIEDS

TVR TUSCAN
2003, 20,500 miles, £34,995
Brutish yet brilliant to drive – when it works. This low-miler seems a safe bet, thanks to an extensive service history and claimed meticulous maintenance by its previous owner. And just look at that Ferrari Grigio Titanio paintwork.

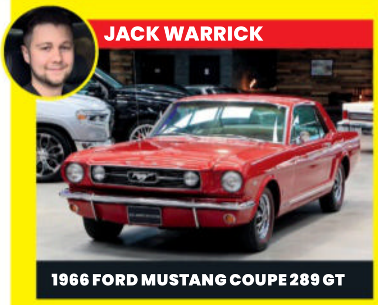
TVR SAGARIS
2005, 27,000 miles, £67,995
That this is seemingly the only Sagaris for sale online right now shows just how rare they are. This one gets 406bhp and 349lb ft from a 4.0-litre straight six, which is said to be in good order after a thorough service in 2022. A host of fresh parts, including a new clutch, have been fitted too.

TVR CHIMAERA
1999, 84,000 miles, £13,495
This well-used soft-top looks to be in excellent condition for a 26-year-old car. You only need to look at its last five advisory-free MOT tests to know it has been well cared for. It's a great spec, too, with immaculate paint and leather seats.

TVR CERBERA
1997, 54,000 miles, £17,500
A brave choice, as it features TVR's own 4.2-litre V8, but with a long list of replaced parts, an extensive service history and an MOT until next summer, it looks to be worth a punt, even if there are niggles with the interior.

Head to head

JACK WARRICK



1966 FORD MUSTANG COUPE 289 GT

VS

SAM PHILLIPS

2019 CHEVROLET CAMARO 6.2 V8

Brief: Find an American muscle car that can outdrag a European supercar for no more than £35k

SP How cool is this mighty £30,000 Chevy? Looks like it's straight off the Transformers set with that funky Bumblebee livery. That private plate won't be to everyone's taste but the 6.2 V8 certainly will.

JW The only good thing about Transformers was the ending. For a muscle car that screams cool, a ’Stang is the only option. This 1966 coupé, at £29,995, has a 4.7 V8, too.

SP Hmm, that's a damn good find, and I bet there aren't many in such good condition. However, with just 225bhp at its disposal, it wouldn't stand a chance against my 447bhp Camaro, or many European supercars for that matter.

JW Buzz off! There's a classiness to the Mustang that your tacky Camaro simply can't match. Fine, my stallion can't muster the pace of even a modern hatchback, but think of it more as a cruiser. All your speed will give you is more time at the pumps and an empty wallet.

SP Look, I'd happily pootle on to a local car show in that lovely old Mustang, but it's hardly an economical alternative, is it? And I wouldn't want to keep paying to maintain it. If you're after true muscle car performance and head-turning looks as well as everyday usability, you need something much more modern.

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The Autocar Lost in the archive

Alpine A110 drivers filled podium; Hannu Mikkola was fourth in a Ford Escort

Chaos and anger on first-ever WRC rally

One of the few January norms that isn't utterly miserable is the Monte Carlo Rally. First held way back in 1911, it has served as an exciting, snowy-mountainside opener to almost every year since for rallyists. Today, it's a standard World Rally Championship round, but historically it was an absolute epic, with crews departing from various locations all over Europe to meet in the French Alps and sprint down to the waterfront in Monaco.

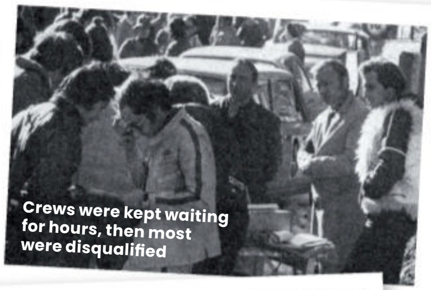
So romantic was the format for the first-ever WRC event in 1973 – but this was far from an auspicious inauguration. Just a glance at the final classification suggests why: 44 cars finished, 234 didn't. Yikes!

This wasn't the result of some horrendous pile-up, thankfully. Instead, they were disqualified en masse by the organisers. This was a highly controversial decision, of course, made worse by the fact that almost all of those affected were privateers who had paid a large sum for an experience.

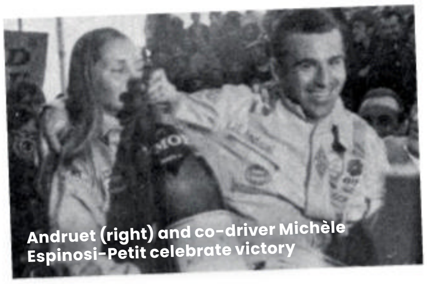
The privateers had already been irked before the rally even started when the organisers had belatedly announced that studded tyres would be banned on the Col du Corobin mountain climb, due to concerns over them unduly wearing the road surface, thus requiring all to carry an extra set of rubber – a decision on which they relented after the backlash.

Then, on the third day, as has so often been the case on 'The Monte', snow and ice created chaos.

Privateer Ferdi Bökmann broke an arm crashing his Alpine A110 on the Concentration Run, and the stage had to be held up for an hour while an ambulance arrived. Later that afternoon there was a further delay in starting the Burzet Loop stage when a non-competing car had an accident. Overall leader Bernard Darniche promptly buried his works A110 in a snow bank, then Björn Waldegård followed suit in one of Fiat's 124 Abarths, all while the conditions deteriorated, harsh winds working to rebuild the snow drifts earlier cleared by ploughs.



Crews were kept waiting for hours, then most were disqualified



Andruet (right) and co-driver Michèle Espinosi-Petit celebrate victory

Some 20 cars got stuck on the stage, either having crashed or got stuck behind those that had. Ambulances and tow trucks had to be allowed in, leading to yet more time delays. And come 11.30pm the road was closed, blocked by snow.

Expunging the stage seemed logical, but instead the organisers decided that only those 65 cars that had made it through could continue, with the other 140 or so being disqualified for falling outside of maximum lateness.

'This didn't go down well' would be a understatement. Indeed, a group of aggrieved privateers (primarily Italians and Germans) raced over to Gap and Digne with the intention of stopping the rally.

"The angry brigade blocked the road with their cars and service vehicles," reported Autocar. "Some experienced competitors found another route without trouble, but others took to the fields to find a way round. [Datsun 240Z driver] Rauno Aaltonen found his way blocked three times and eventually called the police to clear the road."

We wondered whether there would be further protests on the Mountain Circuit or the rally would be scrapped, but the organisers managed to calm an audience of hostile competitors, in part by offering them free entries for 1974.

We could then focus instead on the exciting battle unfolding between Alpine's Jean-Claude Andruet and Ove Andersson, separated by just 14 seconds as they began the final stage – and it was the former who put in a "splendid time" to become the first-ever WRC rally winner.

Although a bigger talking point in the aftermath was yet another point of controversy: "The penalties for traffic infringements on the Concentration Runs and the number of radar speed traps and similarly aggressive police patrols which were in evidence later suggest that the traditional blind eye cast by French officialdom for *le sport* no longer applies. In too many cases, drivers were tricked into breaking the law (by being waved across stop signs at junctions by police, for example) so that the 'strength' of the system could be proved."

KRIS CULMER

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V21 COX	£1400
C23 COX	£1400
D23 COX	£1500
A24 COX	£1600
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674 DA	£3800
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A25 DAY	£1400
DAZ 140	£1300
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E12 DEB	£1500
G21 DEB	£1700
B23 DEB	£1400
C23 DEB	£1300
E23 DEB	£1400
A24 DEB	£1600
E26 DEC	£975
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G21 DEE	£1500
P21 DEE	£975
B23 DEE	£975
C23 DEE	£1300
A24 DEE	£975
D24 DEE	£1400
P1 DEK	£1400
A11 DEL	£3500
D21 DEL	£1200
F21 DEL	£1300
B23 DEL	£1200
C23 DEL	£975
E23 DEL	£1200
A26 DEL	£2300
A25 DEM	£1300
C25 DEM	£1100
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H21 DJH	£975
C21 DJM	£1300
F25 DJM	£1200
S25 DJW	£975
A9 DKC	£1500
J8 DLY	£1200
D21 DLY	£1100
J2 DMA	£1300
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A26 DMS	£1200
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D21 DOC	£1400
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A26 DOM	£1300
H26 DOM	£1100
V11 DON	£2400
C20 DON	£1500
D22 DON	£1700
K23 DON	£1300
DON 39K	£1400
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1943 DP	£2300
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DS 7013	£1400
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L1 DTM	£975
D21 DUN	£1500
G21 DUN	£1200
J21 DUN	£1300
D26 DUN	£1100
DV 6243	£1700
S4 DXN	£1600
K9 EAN	£2500
D25 EBS	£1300
887 ECG	£1300
F21 EDY	£975
EG 8945	£1900
8713 EH	£975
H26 ELA	£975
D25 ELL	£1300
G25 ELL	£975
H25 ELN	£1400
H25 ELS	£975
D21 EMA	£1400
E23 EMA	£1200
A24 EMA	£1300
226 EMB	£1400
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E24 EVE	£1200
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G26 GEE	£1300
C26 GEM	£1300
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F26 HAN	£1100
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A26 HOL	£1500
B26 HOL	£1400
E26 HOL	£1400
59 HP	£12750
H5 HUT	£1100
HVG 853	£1300
H21 JAC	£1600
D23 JAC	£1300
JAD 9V	£1500
E15 JAG	£1600
A24 JAG	£1300
W27 JAG	£1200
V44 JAG	£1400
S88 JAG	£1500
N99 JAG	£1300
N12 JAK	£1100
G19 JAK	£1400
D21 JAK	£1400
H21 JAK	£1400
A22 JAK	£1400
B22 JAK	£1200
P23 JAK	£1300
A26 JAM	£975
C21 JAN	£1800
D21 JAN	£1900
G21 JAN	£1800
Y22 JAN	£1400
B44 JAN	£1700
T66 JAN	£1700
B92 JAN	£1300
Y222 JAN	£975
E19 JAS	£1500
C21 JAS	£1500
D21 JAS	£1500
A24 JAS	£1500
C22 JAY	£1400
D23 JAY	£1600
G24 JAY	£1200
JAZ 343	£1200
JB 1931	£3900
JB 3995	£3600
W2 JBM	£1200
N5 JCD	£1200
B25 JCK	£975
JDJ 256	£1400
W1 JEE	£1900
R5 JEE	£1300
F21 JEF	£1400
A22 JEF	£1300
70 JEF	£4500
E21 JEN	£1900
S321 JEN	£1200
A22 JES	£1500
C22 JES	£1400
D22 JES	£1300
JF 1581	£3700
JG 5102	£3300
N2 JLR	£1200
JM 8099	£2600
JM 8414	£2500
T2 JMA	£1300
73 JMB	£4900
B13 JMC	£1100
C23 JMC	£1300
64 JMD	£4900
L5 JMG	£975
W9 JMP	£1300
B21 JMS	£1300
C23 JMS	£1100
A24 JOE	£1500
D24 JOE	£1400
E24 JOE	£1300
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E21 JON	£1600
H21 JON	£1400
A23 JON	£1400
G23 JON	£1200
D24 JON	£1300
K100 JON	£1100
S999 JON	£1200
J24 JOY	£975
X6 JPL	£1400
JSU 450	£975
P7 JUD	£1300
JUD 13W	£1200
JV 9527	£1800
8738 JW	£2400
77 JWX	£1500
A26 KAM	£975
N6 KAR	£1500
C21 KAY	£1500
H21 KAY	£1400
A24 KAY	£1400
KAZ 663	£1300
KDN 563	£1300
C21 KEL	£1300
L10 KEN	£975
T21 KEN	£1300
A22 KEN	£1500
D22 KEN	£1200
A21 KER	£1500
G21 KEV	£1500
E22 KEV	£1200
A24 KEV	£1400
K80 KEV	£1300
N99 KEV	£1100
120 KGC	£1400
L8 KJS	£1200
444 KL	£6900
710 KM	£4100
L8 KMR	£1300
5438 KP	£1500
1306 KR	£1700
A21 KYM	£1200
LAC 3B	£2700
E22 LAN	£1200
H25 LAN	£1100
C26 LAN	£1200
A25 LAU	£1400
E21 LAW	£1400
G21 LAW	£1500
D24 LAW	£1400
J24 LAW	£1500
M66 LAW	£1600
S66 LAW	£1600
W6 LCW	£1100
A25 LDO	£975
C25 LEA	£1200
A24 LEC	£1900
E21 LEE	£1600
G21 LEE	£1700
D22 LEE	£1600
A24 LEE	£1600
J123 LEE	£1300
Y1 LEN	£2400
N5 LEN	£1900
L21 LEN	£1200
A23 LEN	£975
G23 LEN	£1600
E24 LEN	£1600
R2 LES	£1900
P5 LES	£1800
N12 LES	£1700
E21 LES	£1700
H21 LES	£1600
A22 LES	£1300
G24 LES	£1700
J24 LES	£1100
S28 LES	£1400
L121 LES	£1300
A12 LEW	£1500
R28 LEY	£975
8720 LG	£1700
A25 LLA	£1500
E22 LLY	£1300
A26 LLY	£975
847 LOR	£3100
K2 LOU	£2700
A26 LOU	£1700
P31 LOU	£1500
G21 LOW	£1800
A21 LYN	£2200
B21 LYN	£1400
C21 LYN	£1900
D21 LYN	£1800
F21 LYN	£1900
H21 LYN	£1400
G23 LYN	£1500
N23 MAC	£1400
R23 MAD	£1500
A25 MAD	£1700
D26 MAD	£1600
C20 MAL	£1500
D21 MAL	£1400
G21 MAL	£1300
H21 MAL	£1200
J23 MAL	£975
G21 MAR	£1200
J21 MAR	£1400
C23 MAR	£1300
A26 MAS	£975
B23 MAT	£1200
E23 MAT	£1300
W10 MAX	£2900
D21 MAX	£1800
G21 MAX	£1600
H21 MAX	£1500
A24 MAX	£1700
B11 MAY	£1500
C21 MAY	£1400
D21 MAY	£1400
G21 MAY	£1400
A24 MAY	£1400
MB 517	£11000
A21 MCA	£1400
B21 MCA	£1300
D21 MCA	£1300
S111 MCA	£1300
X6 MCC	£1300
D26 MCK	£975
A25 MED	£1900
D26 MEG	£1300
H26 MEG	£1500
C80 MEG	£1400
D21 MEL	£1700
G23 MEL	£1500
C24 MEL	£1600
L21 MES	£975
A24 MET	£1500
W6 MEW	£975
D9 MEW	£1200
A26 MEY	£1200
P9 MGB	£975
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G21 MJB	£1200
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E26 MJC	£1200
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1333 ML	£2900
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MMW 157	£1700
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A26 MOR	£1200
A26 MOS	£975
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C25 NDY	£1300
D25 NDY	£1200
D24 NEL	£1100
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C26 NKY	£1200
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C26 PAR	£975
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R9 PAT	£1900
C18 PAT	£1500
M19 PAT	£1600
K24 PAT	£1100
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5173 PG	£1300
8663 PG	£1500
9256 PJ	£1200
PJW 467	£2700
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6525 PP	£1600
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A24 RAY	£1300
B24 RAY	£1600
T26 RAY	£1100
S29 RAY	£1200
M50 RAY	£1400
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F19 ROY	£1400
A21 ROY	£1800
ROY 66W	£1200
ROY 674	£1900
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G322 RRY	£1200
B26 RTY	£1300
677 RU	£1900
809 RU	£1700
S8 RUN	£1800
C21 RUS	£1300
B23 RUS	£1100
4018 RW	£2100
5321 RW	£2200
A25 RYN	£1200
X16 SAB	£975
A22 SAL	£975
C24 SAM	£2100
A26 SAM	£3300
B26 SAM	£1700
E26 SAM	£1800
F26 SAM	£1900
H26 SAM	£1800
SAM 33S	£4300
B3 SAN	£2700
B11 SAN	£1500
G17 SAR	£1100
H24 SAR	£1300
C26 SAR	£1500
123 SBE	£1600
S3 SCA	£1300
A25 SEB	£975
H2 SET	£1200
R23 SHA	£2500
H26 SHA	£1500
A21 SHE	£1500
SHE 52S	£1200
A26 SHH	£975
A23 SJB	£975
A26 SJC	£1300
E26 SJC	£1100
E21 SJH	£1100
G21 SJH	£1200
H26 SJM	£1300
SJM 28S	£1600
S1 SKW	£1500
SLK 1E	£3500
SP 2566	£3900
T3 SPY	£1700
E25 SRA	£1600
D4 SRB	£1300
ST 8438	£3300
STR 1N	£3400
STT 347	£975
J17 STU	£1600
C26 STU	£1600
D41 STU	£1500
STY 15	£3100
A24 SUE	£1700
F24 SUE	£1300
H24 SUE	£1100
SUE 59G	£1500
SUE 79W	£1600
SUG 383	£975
R4 SUN	£1500
SYA 441	£1200
D5 TAF	£1500
H26 TCH	£1400
R6 TDW	£1100
TEG 252	£1500
E25 TEL	£1400
H25 TEW	£1100
A25 TOM	£2300
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J400 TOM	£1100
B25 TON	£1400
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UPE 885	£975
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L5 VAL	£1600
W5 VAL	£1600
263 VAL	£1700
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544 VPB	£975
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G25 WEB	£1600
A26 WEB	£1500
C26 WEB	£1500
D26 WEB	£1400
G26 WEB	£1400
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REGISTRATIONS URGENTLY WANTED
FOR IMMEDIATE PURCHASE

ROAD TEST RESULTS

Autocar's history of the independent, objective and empirical road testing of new cars is the longest in the world. But like everything that endures, our road testing process has always moved with the times.

Until recently, it was thought that our first instrumented road test report was published on an Austin Seven in April 1928, but fresh research has lately revealed that the tradition is older still.

For more than a century, these road tests have been verifying, describing and illustrating the performance and characteristics in close detail, one new car at a time. Driving impressions have always been a key component part of them, around which other elements have changed. In early years, these test elements included benchmarking of braking effort, gradient climbing capability and rolling resistance. Later they expanded to take in acceleration, top speed and stopping distance, as well as cruising noise level. Cabin dimensions and measured weight became included too.

Today we use the Horiba MIRA proving ground in the Midlands to take similar performance benchmarks of new cars – and we've recently expanded the test's remit to take in braking stamina over repeated stops and, in the case of electrified cars, DC rapid-charging performance and measured acceleration at both high and low indicated state of charge. All are key indicators of the integrity of vehicle engineering in this emerging era.

Some of our road tests also include lap-time performance benchmarks where appropriate, but all are designed first and foremost to assess the fitness for intended purpose of any given new car - and to do it better and more thoroughly than any other independent test there is.

You can dig deeper into their findings and learn more about more than a century of road tests with a subscription to the ever-expanding digital Autocar Archive (visit themagazineshop.com/aca23ed/aca).

Matt Saunders, road test editor

ABARTH

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
500 Esseesse	★★★★☆	25.3.09	Charm on a stick. Raucous and fun.	7.6	6.5	1135	35.8	-
500e Turismo	★★★⯪☆	9.8.23	A stylish and entertaining pint-size EV but pricey and needs refining.	6.9	6.4	1395	-	142
595 Competizione	★★★⯪☆	26.2.14	Great when it's good but tiring when it's bad.	7.5	6.4	1135	39.2	-

ALFA ROMEO

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Giulia Quadrifoglio	★★★★⯪	29.3.17	Everything you would want a fast Alfa Romeo saloon to be. A triumph.	4.5	3.2	1700	35.7	-
Stelvio 2.2D 210 Milano Edizione	★★★⯪☆	3.1.18	Spry-handling SUV is likeable, if short of the class's usual refinements.	6.8	7.0	1815	49.7	-
Stelvio Quadrifoglio	★★★⯪☆	9.1.19	A real driver's car, but it stretches SUV-related bounds of acceptability.	4.0	3.3	1931	31.9	-
Stelvio 2.0T 280 Veloce AWD	★★★★☆	28.6.23	Short on premium refinement but meets its discreetly sporty brief well.	5.7	5.3	1784	32.2	-

ALPINE

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A110 Première Edition	★★★★★	16.5.18	Hilarious fun delivered in effusive and accessible fashion.	4.7	3.8	1125	45.6	-
A110 Légende GT	★★★★⯪	9.3.22	The best fast A110 we've seen but not quite the definitive version.	4.8	3.9	1140	40.2	-
A110 R	★★★⯪☆	15.11.23	Hardcore A110 has its lures but probably not enough of them for its price.	4.2	3.5	1094	39.7	-

ARIEL

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Atom 4	★★★★★	9.10.19	Track-slayer is unrivalled for built-in quality and dynamic character.	3.2	2.4	680	39.2	-

ASTON MARTIN

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Vantage	★★★★⯪	18.9.24	Baby Aston grows up to spectacular effect. A machine of stunning breadth and likeability.	3.5	2.6	1745	28.5	-
DBS Superleggera	★★★★★	21.11.18	Effortlessly fast and intoxicating to drive, the big Aston is better than ever.	3.7	2.7	1910	25.6	-
DBX	★★★★⯪	28.10.20	Does everyday driver appeal better than any other super-SUV.	4.6	3.8	2328	24.8	-
DBX 707	★★★★☆	30.11.22	A better DBX to drive, but still leaves room for improvement.	3.3	2.8	2278	26.2	-

AUDI

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A1 Sportback 35 TFSI S Line Style Edition	★★★⯪☆	2.10.19	Luxury supermini lacks the polish to justify its high price.	7.9	8.4	1209	57.0	-
S3 Sportback	★★★⯪☆	18.11.20	Audi delivers an effective if somewhat unlovable hot hatch.	4.8	4.2	1552	39.0	-
A4 2.0 TDI 190PS S Line S Tronic	★★★★☆	4.11.15	An even smarter and better way to travel than before but still ordinary to drive.	8.4	7.3	1480	-	-
RS4 Avant	★★★★☆	14.2.18	A hot estate that oozes class but is curiously short on charisma.	4.0	3.5	1790	36.7	-
S4 TDI	★★★★☆	18.9.19	Diesel power sparks an appealingly different identity for this fast Audi.	4.6	4.1	1871	54.3	-
S5 Launch Edition	★★★★☆	15.1.25	Rounded sports saloon with a characterful V6 and new-found dose of driver appeal.	4.1	3.8	2027	33.7	-
A5 Sportback 2.0 TFSI 252PS Quattro S Line S Tronic	★★★⯪☆	8.3.17	Sleek mid-sized executive fastback is still short of a selling point beyond its style.	5.7	5.3	1535	41.1	-
A6 Avant 40 TDI S Line S Tronic	★★★★☆	14.11.18	High-tech throwback is a timely reminder of what Audi does best.	8.4	7.5	1710	50.1	-
RS6 Avant Carbon Black	★★★★☆	11.3.20	Bigger on luxury and usability than rawness or involvement.	3.3	2.8	2217	32.8	-
A6 50 TFSIe Quattro S Line	★★★★☆	5.1.22	Hybrid tech boosts saloon's refinement, charm and running credentials.	5.7	5.2	2077	45.4	34
A7 Sportback 50 TDI Quattro Sport	★★★⯪☆	11.7.18	Easy on the eye and to live with but let down by stolid dynamics.	5.8	5.3	1880	53.1	-
A8 L 60 TFSIe Quattro Sport	★★★⯪☆	17.6.20	Technically impressive but not as cosseting as a limo ought to be.	-	-	2330	-	-
E-tron 55 Quattro	★★★★⯪	26.6.19	A rounded, uber-luxurious addition to the premium EV niche.	5.4	4.2	2569	-	218
E-tron S Quattro	★★★⯪☆	2.6.21	A slick, tech-laden luxury operator but no dynamic landmark for EVs.	4.2	3.6	2643	-	-
Q2 1.4 TFSI Sport	★★★⯪☆	9.11.16	Fit for purpose but a less compelling option than it might have been.	8.1	8.2	1316	-	-
SQ2 Quattro S Tronic	★★★★☆	20.3.19	More fun than you might expect from a crossover or an Audi S model.	4.5	4.1	1530	34.5	-
Q4 E-tron 40 Sport	★★★⯪☆	7.7.21	Practical, pleasant and efficient but not a superior premium product.	8.1	7.8	2112	-	-
Q5 2.0 TDI 190PS Quattro S Line S Tronic	★★★★☆	15.3.17	Like the previous Q5 but with additional class, dynamism and polish.	8.3	8.5	1770	42.5	-
SQ5 TSI Quattro	★★★⯪☆	21.6.17	Mid-sized performance SUV bites off more than it can chew.	5.5	5.0	1870	32.6	-
SQ5 Sportback TDI Quattro	★★★⯪☆	3.8.22	Not the sharpest fast SUV, but the real-world appeal is clear to see.	5.1	4.6	2023	49.0	-
Q6 E-tron Quattro Edition 1	★★★⯪☆	2.10.24	EV is hard to love, easier to recommend, with good dynamics and strong EV credentials.	5.3	4.3	–	2.8	247
Q7 3.0 TDI Quattro S Line	★★★★☆	12.8.15	Chiselled, plush, suave and spacious. Only so-so to drive, though.	6.2	6.2	2245	-	-
SQ7 4.0 TDI Quattro	★★★★⯪	26.10.16	A class-topping blend of superlative comfort and usable performance.	5.1	4.5	2330	37.9	-
Q8 50 TDI S Line	★★★★☆	26.9.18	Striking and effective SUV-coupé leaves us wanting more.	6.9	6.7	2285	40.1	-
R8 V10 Plus	★★★★☆	30.12.15	Supercar grips and goes even harder but wants for its predecessor's delicacy.	3.1	2.6	1730	-	-

BENTLEY

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Bentayga W12	★★★★⯪	18.5.16	Versatile, genteel, luxurious SUV with a silken sporting edge.	4.9	4.4	2440	-	-
Bentayga Diesel	★★★★★	5.4.17	Bentley's vision of the perfect SUV gets its missing piece.	5.2	4.6	2645	-	-
Bentayga EWB Mulliner Blackline	★★★★☆	24.4.24	Stretched SUV lacks the Mulsanne limo's charm but is a better luxury car by far.	4.4	3.8	2600	25.6	-
Continental GT W12 First Edition	★★★★⯪	2.5.18	Superb luxury coupé has added dynamism but not enough to top the class.	3.6	2.9	2295	26.4	-
Continental GT Speed	★★★★☆	22.12.21	Remains a wonderful grand tourer but can fall short as an entertainer.	3.4	2.7	2279	22.0	-
Continental GTC V8 S	★★★★⯪	19.4.23	Sporty V8 execution adds vivacity to a car that makes you feel good.	3.6	3.2	2295	29.1	-

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Flying Spur W12 ★★★★⯪ 15.7.20 Trounces rivals for driver appeal but not in every way that matters.	3.9	3.2	2500	32.5	-
Flying Spur Hybrid Mulliner ★★★★⯪ 17.8.22 Mightily convincing PHEV limo more than earns its Bentley wings.	4.4	3.9	2596	30.1	28
BMW					
120 M Sport ★★★⯪☆ 31.12.24 Credible and complete junior BMW still lacks distinguishing driver appeal.	7.3	6.8	1489	45.8	-
218i M Sport Gran Coupé ★★★☆☆ 8.4.20 Junior Gran Coupé hits some high notes but fails to inspire.	8.8	8.4	1375	58.2	-
220i M Sport Coupé ★★★★☆ 1.6.22 A good coupé rather than a great sports car.	7.3	7.3	1546	46.8	-
M2 Coupé Manual ★★★★⯪ 12.7.23 Junior M car takes huge objective leaps but smaller subjective ones.	4.5	3.8	1687	32.1	-
320d M Sport Auto ★★★★★ 15.5.19 BMW's one-time default-choice executive saloon hits even greater heights.	6.9	6.8	1639	63.3	-
330d xDrive M Sport Plus Edition Touring ★★★★⯪ 15.1.20 An estate that's powerful, classy and great to drive – but with a price to match.	5.5	5.2	1922	52.6	-
330e M Sport ★★★★⯪ 1.7.20 Slicker and sweeter-handling than the average PHEV. A true 3 Series.	-	-	1740	-	-
M440i xDrive ★★★★☆ 6.1.21 A rounded, engaging and potent coupé let down only by its looks.	4.1	3.7	1775	44.0	-
M4 Competition ★★★★⯪ 21.4.21 A very modern M car and a brilliantly versatile and enjoyable one.	3.9	2.9	1800	32.7	-
i4 M50 ★★★★☆ 19.1.22 Fast, refined and with lots of traditional appeal to convert sceptics.	4.1	3.2	2248	-	186
M4 CSL ★★★★☆ 16.11.22 A next-level M car, with the more complex temperament to match.	3.6	2.7	1625	31.1	-
i5 eDrive40 M Sport Pro ★★★⯪☆ 29.11.23 Has dynamic appeal but less convincing than BMW's other EV saloons.	5.4	4.4	2213	-	235
550e xDrive M Sport Pro ★★★★☆ 3.4.24 Undeniably capable and a fine plug-in hybrid sports saloon.	4.4	3.5	2232	40.1	47
i7 xDrive60 M Sport ★★★★⯪ 15.2.23 It has taken huge strides as a luxury car – and still drives like a BMW.	4.5	3.4	2758	-	264
840d xDrive ★★★★☆ 16.1.19 A likeable big GT, albeit not the most luxurious or rewarding on sale.	5.0	4.6	1901	49.2	-
M8 Competition Convertible ★★★⯪☆ 5.2.20 Has attitude to spare but isn't the complete super-GT.	3.3	2.7	2020	31.6	-
M8 Competition ★★★⯪☆ 3.6.20 Highly capable but doesn't truly satisfy as either a sports car or a GT.	-	-	1960	-	-
X1 xDrive23i M Sport ★★★⯪☆ 25.1.23 A decent family crossover but a poor BMW.	6.4	6.0	1800	45.6	-
X4 M Competition ★★★☆☆ 13.11.19 Fast and precise, if short on the big-time charisma that you would expect.	4.0	3.3	2028	29.0	-
X5 xDrive30d M Sport ★★★★☆ 2.1.19 Better to drive than the SUV norm but not better across the board.	6.6	6.6	2279	43.1	-
X6 M Competition ★★★☆☆ 20.3.24 Unyielding performance focus makes for a fast but compromised SUV.	3.5	3.1	2442	29.3	-
X7 M50i M Performance xDrive ★★★★☆ 9.9.20 Stunningly large and enviably refined but too excessive for many.	4.8	3.9	2583	30.5	-
X7 M60i xDrive ★★★★☆ 29.3.23 Uncompromising-looking X7 is seriously fast but laudably refined.	4.2	3.7	2600	28.9	-
iX xDrive50 M Sport ★★★★⯪ 2.3.22 Takes the luxury EV to elevated heights, but its design is easy to criticise.	4.4	3.4	2593	-	252
Z4 M40i with Handschalter Pack ★★★★☆ 21.8.24 Manual gearbox gives six-year-old roadster new depth.	5.7	5.9	1561	36.9	-
BMW ALPINA					
B3 GT Touring ★★★★⯪ 15.1.25 Last-dance B3 has mighty breadth and will go down as one of the all-time greats.	3.3	2.7	1910	29.4	-
B8 Gran Coupé ★★★★☆ 22.9.21 Superbly rounded but lacking some dynamism implied by its looks.	3.5	2.8	2100	-	-
BYD					
Atto 3 Design ★★★☆☆ 31.5.23 Lack of attention to detail detracts from the impressive battery tech.	7.0	6.2	1787	-	201
Seal Design ★★★⯪☆ 17.1.24 Frustrating software lets down the mostly impressive hardware.	5.8	4.7	2116	-	279
CATERHAM					
Seven 160 ★★★★☆ 20.11.13 Fun entry-level version of B-road toy smacks just a little of compromise.	8.4	8.7	510	44.8	-
Seven 620S ★★★★⯪ 9.3.16 Supplies fun intravenously with a mix of freneticism and road-going usability.	3.8	4.2	650	29.5	-
Seven 420 Cup ★★★★⯪ 31.8.22 Track-day variant serves up sensational driving thrills – for a price.	4.2	3.4	560	35.3	-
CHEVROLET					
Corvette 3LT ★★★★☆ 22.6.22 Big step up for charismatic, usable and temptingly priced American icon.	3.9	3.2	1679	32.9	-
Corvette Z06 3LZ ★★★★☆ 16.8.23 Incredible engine and chassis makeover, but the price has to be right.	3.1	2.4	1670	26.1	-
CITROEN					
Ami Colour ★★⯪☆☆ 11.1.23 Cleverly conceived but hard to recommend, given its limited capabilities.	-	-	471	-	39
C3 Puretech 110 Flair ★★★⯪☆ 28.12.16 Dynamically challenged, but a cheery design makes this supermini interesting.	9.6	9.4	1050	62.3	-
C3 Aircross Puretech 110 Flair ★★★⯪☆ 7.3.18 Practical small crossover isn't outstanding to drive but is likeable nonetheless.	11.5	10.7	1159	39.5	-
C4 Puretech 130 Shine Plus Auto ★★★☆☆ 26.5.21 Has rational and irrational appeal but lacks a fine-tuned execution.	9.5	9.2	1320	56.4	-
ë-C4 X Shine ★★★⯪☆ 3.5.23 EV motoring done differently, with value, but its successes are qualified.	9.7	8.8	1623	-	162
C5 Aircross BlueHDi 180 Flair Plus ★★★⯪☆ 13.2.19 Attractive and interesting, although its style is better than its substance.	9.0	8.5	1540	47.8	-
C5 X Puretech 180 Shine Plus ★★★★☆ 28.9.22 Good value and comfy, this is the kind of car that Citroën should be making.	7.8	7.1	1502	47.8	-
CUPRA					
Born 204PS 58kWh V3 ★★★⯪☆ 6.7.22 As good as the family hatchback EV class gets in places but not as good as it could be.	6.7	6.2	1794	-	220
Born VZ First Edition ★★★★☆ 9.10.24 An already fine electric car's driver appeal is lifted but not transformed.	5.4	4.2	1996	3.5	269
Leon Estate 310PS VZ3 ★★★★☆ 8.9.21 Fiercely quick and dependable but pulls the heartstrings only lightly.	4.9	4.3	1707	40.1	-
Leon 2.0 TSI 245PS VZ2 ★★★★☆ 27.7.22 Brilliantly rounded hot hatch shines in its simplest spec.	5.9	4.7	1468	43.4	-
Ateca 2.0 TSI 4Drive DSG ★★★⯪☆ 23.1.19 Hot crossover is objectively impressive but lacks true driver reward.	4.9	4.4	1615	36.7	-
Formentor 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2 DSG ★★★★⯪ 3.2.21 Versatile, interesting, rewarding. One of the best fast crossovers yet.	5.1	4.3	1583	36.4	-
DACIA					
Sandero Stepway TCe 90 Prestige ★★★★☆ 28.4.21 Cut-price crossover is compromised in surprisingly few areas.	11.9	11.9	1096	54.1	-
Duster SCe 115 4x2 Comfort ★★★★☆ 22.8.18 Comfortable, simple SUV keeps its budget family motoring star quality.	13.1	12.6	1286	42.2	-
Duster Hybrid 140 Journey ★★★★⯪ 27.11.24 Notably improved yet barely any pricier.	9.7	8.7	1413	40.2	-
Jogger TCe 110 Comfort ★★★★⯪ 20.4.22 Superb versatility, outstanding value and so likeable with it.	11.0	11.0	1267	48.5	-
DALLARA					
Stradale ★★★★⯪ 16.10.19 Has esoteric appeal but is a product of passion and rare dynamism.	3.7	3.4	987	30.1	-
DS					
3 Crossback Puretech 155 Prestige ★★★☆☆ 10.7.19 No design smash hit. Short on perceived quality and dynamic polish.	8.8	8.3	1205	48.6	-
4 E-Tense 225 Performance Line+ ★★★⯪☆ 29.6.22 High price and a list of niggles keep this family hatchback away from the top.	7.4	6.0	1706	44.7	26
7 Crossback Puretech 225 Prestige ★★★⯪☆ 19.9.18 DS's first SUV is a competent but slightly bland addition to the class.	8.6	7.0	1616	44.6	-
7 E-Tense 4x4 360 La Première ★★★⯪☆ 26.4.23 More focused and makes subtle gains, but its powertrain and ride frustrate.	5.7	4.6	1956	36.6	29
9 E-Tense 225 Performance Line Plus ★★★⯪☆ 2.2.22 Posh saloon is alternative and devoted to its luxury remit but no show-stopper.	8.6	7.1	1886	44.7	20
FERRARI					
296 GTB ★★★★★ 21.12.22 Stellar modern-era Ferrari supercar has an unrivalled breadth of talent.	2.7	1.9	1648	37.8	15
SF90 Stradale ★★★★☆ 3.11.21 Sets the performance benchmark but isn't a track-handling great.	2.5	1.8	1698	24.4	16
FIAT					
Panda 1.2 Easy ★★★★⯪ 25.4.12 Was everything a city car ought to be but is now way past its prime.	14.6	15.6	1020	49.1	-
Panda 4x4 Twinair ★★★★☆ 17.4.13 A lovable four-wheel-drive miniature that trades space for style and charm.	14.6	15.8	1195	44.2	-
500 1.4 Lounge ★★★★☆ 19.9.07 Enjoyable city car with the substance to back up its style.	10.3	10.4	1065	42.8	-

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
500C 1.2 Pop ★★★★☆ 5.8.09 Landaulet hits the spot every bit as well as the regular hatchback and is often better.	13.2	14.4	1035	48.3	-
500 Twinair Lounge ★★★½☆ 24.11.10 Characterful and stylish, but its real-world economy lets it down.	11.7	13.0	1070	42.1	-
500e 42kWh Icon ★★★★☆ 26.1.22 More than just an electric city car and a welcome return to form.	8.1	7.7	1365	-	142
600e La Prima ★★★½☆ 27.3.24 Electric crossover is decent value and easy to drive but otherwise a bit easy to overlook.	8.8	7.7	1587	-	173

FORD

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Fiesta 1.0 Ecoboost 125PS Titanium ★★★★½ 9.8.17 A dynamically brilliant supermini but no longer the best one.	6.6	7.8	1218	48.2	-
Fiesta ST ★★★★½ 15.8.18 Great to drive and supreme value but not better than before in all aspects.	6.6	7.8	1218	48.2	-
Focus 1.5 Ecoboost 182PS ST-Line X ★★★★½ 20.2.19 Better to drive and look at than before and impressively good value.	8.9	7.8	1417	43.8	-
Focus ST ★★★★☆ 11.9.19 Big on character and performance but not quite truly immersive.	6.1	4.9	1433	40.7	-
Puma 1.0T 125PS MHEV Titanium ★★★★½ 25.3.20 The driver's car the compact crossover class has been crying out for and more besides.	10.0	9.6	1260	50.0	-
Puma ST ★★★★☆ 24.3.21 Well judged, versatile and fun. The jacked-up hot hatch done well.	7.2	6.2	1301	41.5	-
Explorer Extended Range Premium RWD ★★★½☆ 23.10.24 Electric family crossover is better to drive than rivals, but at a cost.	5.8	4.8	2067	2.9	262
Kuga 2.5 PHEV ST-Line ★★★½☆ 24.6.20 Good value and potentially frugal, but this SUV has more to give.	-	-	1844	-	-
Mustang Mach-E Extended Range RWD ★★★★☆ 23.6.21 Worthy of the name? Perhaps not, but it's still impressive and likeable.	6.8	5.6	2130	-	-
Mustang Mach-E GT AWD ★★★☆☆ 27.4.22 Has its moments but lacks the dynamism of a typical fast Ford.	4.2	3.5	2298	-	-
Mustang Dark Horse ★★★½☆ 20.11.24 Brimming with character but more compromised than many of its forebears.	4.5	3.5	1853	26.1	-
Tourneo Courier 1.0 Ecoboost Titanium ★★★½☆ 10.7.24 Has some Ford-typical star quality but not enough for the money.	10.8	10.6	1426	47.4	-
Transit Custom L2H1 320 2.0 EcoBlue 150PS Limited ★★★★☆ 8.5.24 Likely to remain the default commercial vehicle, despite a high price.	12.1	11.8	1971	38.8	-
Ranger 2.0TD EcoBlue 205PS Wildtrak ★★★★½ 14.6.23 Pick-up truck is practical, car-like to drive and generally hard to fault.	9.8	9.9	2348	36.6	-
F-150 Lightning Platinum ★★★½☆ 17.5.23 Electric truck has huge utility and appealing range, but its size and price will put many off.	4.5	3.7	3121	-	288

GENESIS

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
G70 2.2 CRDi Luxury Line ★★★½☆ 10.11.21 Likeable left-field choice struggles to threaten the establishment.	7.2	6.7	1751	60.4	-
Electrified G80 ★★★½☆ 12.10.22 Electric limo doesn't quite hit the mark like its Kia and Hyundai platform-mates.	4.4	4.0	2349	-	272
GV60 Sport Plus ★★★★☆ 24.8.22 Handsome, fast, sophisticated electric crossover is the best Genesis yet.	3.8	3.1	2192	-	220
GV80 3.0D Luxury 5-Seater ★★★½☆ 15.9.21 Rich, spacious and comfortable but not a world-class luxury SUV yet.	6.7	6.6	2217	45.0	-

GWM ORA

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Funky Cat 48kWh First Edition ★★½☆☆ 1.2.23 Electric hatch is decent value and has funky looks but is a mediocre experience overall.	7.7	7.2	1580	-	154

HONDA

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
E Advance ★★★½☆ 26.8.20 More than just a pretty face in the EV crowd but its limited range is an issue.	7.9	-	1535	-	110
Jazz 1.5 i-MMD Hybrid EX ★★★½☆ 7.10.20 Eminently practical, impressively frugal and pretty joyless to drive.	9.6	10.0	1248	57.0	-
Civic Type R GT ★★★★½ 25.10.17 Hot hatch is a sheer delight for enthusiast drivers and their bank balances.	5.7	7.1	1400	57.0	-
HR-V e:HEV Advance Style ★★★½☆ 24.11.21 Fine ergonomics and big on superficial charm but leaves us cold.	9.2	9.3	1397	43.2	-
e:Ny1 Advance ★★★☆☆ 1.11.23 EV is charming in some ways but has too little substance to justify the price.	8.6	6.9	1756	-	211

HYUNDAI

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
i10 1.2 MPi Premium ★★★★☆ 15.4.20 Smallest Hyundai regains leadership of the city car class.	12.3	12.9	999	52.5	-
i20 1.0 T-GDi 100 48V SE Connect ★★★½☆ 24.2.21 Steady gains for a versatile runabout still lacking some personality.	9.7	10.1	1065	63.5	-
i20 N ★★★★½ 25.8.21 N division's finest car to date. A serious hot hatch with real dynamic polish.	6.1	5.4	1231	50.6	-
i30 Tourer 1.4 T-GDi Premium SE ★★★½☆ 13.9.17 Competent, servile, inoffensive-looking family estate offers little to like or dislike.	9.5	9.7	1425	48.9	-
i30 N Performance ★★★½☆ 28.12.17 Hyundai's first hot hatch attempt is fast and full-blooded with rough edges.	6.4	5.6	1478	43.1	-
Ioniq 6 RWD Ultimate ★★★½☆ 7.6.23 Usable, rangy and innovative EV let down by cabin packaging and ride.	7.2	6.2	2006	-	272
Kona 1.0 120PS Advance ★★★★☆ 6.9.23 Hyundai brings some cheer, value and space to the compact crossover class.	10.4	10.3	1352	50.4	-
Tucson 1.6 T-GDi Hybrid Premium ★★★★☆ 17.3.21 Tucson shows that Hyundai can do both style and substance.	7.6	6.2	1612	47.7	-
Ioniq 5 N ★★★★★ 7.8.24 A little big and heavy, but compelling like no other EV to date.	3.5	2.7	2221	-	224
Santa Fe Hybrid 4WD Premium ★★★★☆ 16.10.24 A superb lounge on wheels, but let down by its powertrain.	7.9	7.5	2007	32.9	-
Nexo ★★★½☆ 12.6.19 Impressive effort that heads in the right direction for hydrogen fuel cell cars.	9.6	9.7	1852	-	-

INEOS

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Grenadier 3.0 T Fieldmaster ★★★½☆ 20.9.23 Unquestionably a serious proposition but maybe lacking in innovation.	8.0	8.1	2682	20.9	-

JAGUAR

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
XE 2.0 200PS R-Sport ★★★★½ 1.7.15 Junior saloon hits the spot, matching the best of its German rivals at their own game.	7.6	6.7	1530	48.7	-
XF 2.0d 180PS R-Sport ★★★★½ 2.12.15 A more mature, better all-round prospect, with excellent dynamics.	9.4	9.0	1595	-	-
XF Sportbrake 300PS R-Sport AWD ★★★½☆ 17.4.19 Estate is built on enthusiast values but in need of a wider update.	6.6	6.2	1727	36.8	-
E-Pace D180 AWD SE ★★★½☆ 11.4.18 Misses the mark for keen drivers but is a desirable SUV nevertheless.	9.9	10.5	1768	49.2	-
I-Pace EV400 S ★★★★½ 12.9.18 Jaguar's landmark car strikes a heavy blow to Tesla's luxury EV monopoly.	4.5	3.5	2236	-	-
F-Pace 2.0d AWD R-Sport ★★★★☆ 11.5.16 By and large, and engine apart, this is the Jaguar SUV that we hoped it would be.	9.2	9.7	1775	-	-
F-Pace SVR ★★★★½ 24.7.19 Broad-batted and can vividly thrill but hasn't forgotten its SUV roots.	4.1	3.5	2070	29.4	-
F-Pace 400e R-Dynamic HSE ★★★★½ 1.12.21 Facelift hits the mark. Electrification is a mixed but creditable success.	5.1	4.6	2264	-	24
F-Type V8 S Convertible ★★★★☆ 12.6.13 As good to drive as it is to behold – but at a material and financial cost.	4.0	3.4	1810	28.5	-
F-Type V6 S Coupé ★★★★½ 11.6.14 Stunning looks and a sensation to drive but not quite unequalled.	4.9	4.2	1755	32.5	-
F-Type 2.0 R-Dynamic Coupé ★★★★☆ 22.11.17 Plenty of driver appeal, but its cracking chassis merits a better engine.	5.7	5.1	1640	43.6	-
F-Type P575 R AWD Coupé ★★★★☆ 29.4.20 The same likeable bruiser behind those prettier features.	-	-	1743	-	-

JEEP

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Avenger Electric Summit ★★★½☆ 24.1.24 Not perfect but successfully takes Jeep in a fresh direction.	8.3	6.9	1601	-	172

TOP 3

BEST HYBRIDS

1 Toyota Corolla

2 Volkswagen Golf eHybrid

3 Volvo V60 T6

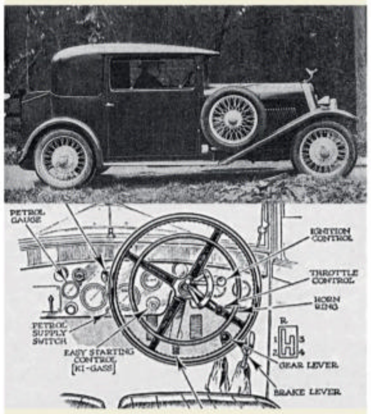
SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

Road tests revisited

2004 PORSCHE CARRERA GT

Limited-run supercar emerges from cancelled Le Mans project with 1992 Formula 1-derived V10. "Feels like a 600bhp Boxster", but that's no criticism. Rather, it's "the best supercar ever made and perhaps the most exciting road car in history".

Price £318,478
Engine V10, 5733cc, petrol
Power 603bhp at 8000rpm
Torque 435lb ft at 5750rpm
Weight 1472kg
0-60mph 3.7sec
0-100mph 7.4sec
Top speed 205mph
Economy 15.2mpg



1929 LEA-FRANCIS HYPER SPORTS COUPE

First blown Brit is road version of Ulster TT race-winning S-Type. Hyper "needs to be treated with respect" but "can be cornered very fast and is most steady at high speeds", and "driver does not feel he needs to make some effort to pick his way along".

Price £525
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1496cc, supercharged, petrol
Power 60bhp (est)
Torque na
Weight 1000kg (est)
10-30mph 5sec
Top speed 85mph
Economy 20mpg

READ FULL ROAD TEST FOR FREE*

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Compass 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited	★★★⯪☆	3.10.18	Pricey, pokey, gruff Jeep is a long shot for SUV market success.	11.0	11.5	1540	44.8	-
Compass 4xe S	★★★☆☆	16.2.22	Not without niche appeal but off the pace in too many respects.	6.4	5.7	1872	46.9	22
Renegade 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited	★★★⯪☆	28.10.15	Charmingly authentic but also pricey and rather rough and ready.	10.8	11.2	1502	52.6	-
Renegade 4xe Trailhawk	★★★☆☆	30.6.21	Electrified Jeep has some charm but is typically rough and ready.	6.7	5.6	1816	39.4	21
Wrangler 2.2 Multijet II Overland	★★★★☆	10.4.19	Off-road icon is now more competent on it.	9.0	9.1	2122	37.6	-

KGM

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Tivoli XLV ELX Auto	★★★☆☆	14.9.16	Practical, well-priced crossover is competent but far from compelling.	12.0	12.6	1469	-	-

KIA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Picanto 1.0 MPI 2	★★★⯪☆	11.9.24	No great advance for the breed but likeable, capable and still here.	13.4	13.9	985	51.4	-
Ceed 1.6 CRDi 115bhp 2	★★★★☆	29.8.18	Big step up in the family hatchback class is a watershed moment for Kia.	9.9	9.6	1411	70.3	-
Proceed 1.4 T-GDi GT-Line S	★★★⯪☆	27.2.19	Alluring and interesting but not quite as special to drive as it looks.	9.5	8.9	1475	42.6	-
Xceed 1.4 T-GDi First Edition	★★★⯪☆	20.11.19	Looks good and drives well but lacks some practicality and polish.	9.3	8.7	1452	46.8	-
Soul EV Urban	★★★⯪☆	5.7.23	Not actually that cheap but likeable and complete.	8.0	8.3	1569	-	147
Niro EV 3	★★★★☆	7.9.22	A good family EV made better, despite some missed opportunities.	6.9	5.6	1739	-	246
EV3 81.4kWh GT-Line	★★★★☆	31.12.24	New-era Niro is rationally compelling but not a game-changer.	7.2	6.4	1858	2.6	265
Sportage 1.6 HEV 2WD GT-Line S	★★★⯪☆	15.6.22	Bold family SUV catches the eye but won't hold your interest to drive.	7.3	6.4	1658	44.8	-
EV6 77.4kWh RWD GT-Line S	★★★★☆	9.10.24	Not the outstanding EV it once was but still a likeably bold choice.	7.5	6.3	-	2.9	227
EV6 GT	★★★⯪☆	4.10.23	Lots of pace and usability for the money but not enough driver appeal.	3.6	2.7	2161	-	209
Sorento 1.6 HEV T-GDi AWD 2	★★★⯪☆	20.1.21	Lacks polish, but its abundant utility appeal and value shine through.	8.5	7.9	2006	43.3	-
EV9 GT-Line S	★★★★☆	31.1.24	Style, space, versatility and range for a more reasonable price than rivals.	5.1	4.6	2660	-	220

LAMBORGHINI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Huracán Performante	★★★★⯪	11.10.17	Breathtaking track makeover brings it close to greatness.	2.9	2.0	1590	22.4	-
Huracán Evo RWD	★★★★⯪	20.5.20	Finest driver's car Lamborghini makes is also the most attainable.	-	-	1389	-	-
Revuelto	★★★★⯪	4.12.24	New-era V12 Lamborghini is an extraordinary statement of intent.	2.5	1.7	1960	24.1	6
Urus	★★★★☆	3.7.19	Italy's latest 'mostro' has a driving experience to blow your mind.	3.3	2.8	2285	28.5	-

LAND ROVER

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Range Rover Evoque P300e R-Dynamic HSE	★★★★⯪	10.2.21	A better plug-in compact SUV. Expensive but slick and luxurious.	6.8	5.9	2158	32.7	24
Discovery Sport 2.2D HSE Luxury	★★★★☆	18.3.15	Practical, capable, desirable and, despite a few flaws, great to drive.	8.9	9.0	2081	-	-
Discovery Sport D180 AWD SE	★★★★☆	8.1.20	Off-road fidelity and character outweigh a lacklustre powertrain.	10.3	10.5	2145	47.5	-
Discovery TD6 HSE Luxury	★★★★⯪	12.4.17	A proper Land Rover, modernised, refined and as likeable as ever.	8.7	8.8	2230	-	-
Range Rover Velar D240 HSE	★★★⯪☆	30.8.17	Stylish, advanced and accomplished but in need of a better powertrain.	9.3	9.0	2089	48.2	-
Defender 110 P400 X	★★★★⯪	13.5.20	World-class capability. Brilliant on and off road – at a price.	-	-	2388	-	-
Range Rover Sport D300 Dynamic SE	★★★★⯪	2.11.22	Deeply appealing and deeply accomplished, with a price to match.	7.2	6.6	2511	42.5	-
Range Rover Sport SV Edition One	★★★⯪☆	28.8.24	More capable than most rivals, but others are more compelling.	3.9	5.1	2546	28.9	-
Range Rover D350 HSE	★★★★⯪	13.7.22	A fantastically well-isolated luxury car and fully paid-up capable 4x4.	6.3	6.0	2667	35.9	-

LEXUS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
LBX FWD Premium Plus Design	★★★⯪☆	29.5.24	Crossover convinces as a small premium car, but only just.	8.4	8.4	1306	45.2	-
NX 350h AWD Premium Plus Pack	★★★★☆	16.3.22	Interesting, refined and efficient, but not as polished as the best.	7.1	6.7	1812	44.7	-
RX 500h F Sport	★★★⯪☆	22.3.23	Classy and luxurious, but that might not be enough for keener drivers.	6.1	5.5	2088	31.7	-
ES 300h Takumi	★★★⯪☆	6.2.19	Boldly styled, economical saloon has a singularly rational but dry character.	8.7	7.6	1742	48.8	-
LS 500h Premier	★★★☆☆	6.6.18	Limo has never been more appealing or less competitive in key areas.	5.9	5.3	2404	42.2	-
RC F Ultimate Edition	★★★⯪☆	6.11.24	Bellows in some ways, whispers in others. A little flawed but never dull or boring.	4.7	3.8	1733	30.1	-
LM 350h AWD Takumi	★★★☆☆	7.2.24	MPV is a fascinating luxury-market curio but no threat to the old-school limo.	8.6	8.2	2368	40.5	-

LOTUS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Eletre R	★★★⯪☆	24.7.24	There's plenty to like about the new Lotus but little sign of the old Lotus.	3.1	2.2	2682	-	216

MASERATI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ghibli Diesel	★★★⯪☆	12.3.14	Saloon isn't lacking in style but is a little short on substance.	6.5	6.0	2040	40.4	-
Grecale Trofeo	★★★⯪☆	18.10.23	A belting engine but high-priced and not the best-driving Grecale.	3.6	3.2	2097	33.6	-
Levante Diesel	★★★☆☆	30.11.16	A mildly interesting also-ran, with a weak engine and so-so handling.	6.8	6.9	2205	41.5	-
Levante S Granlusso	★★★⯪☆	8.5.19	Better engine improves the class's curate's egg but can't redeem it.	5.1	4.5	2232	23.7	-
Granturismo Trofeo	★★★⯪☆	11.9.24	An appealing grand tourer that lacks some sophistication for the price.	3.6	3.1	-	33.0	-
MC20 Cielo	★★★★☆	16.10.24	Dynamic iconoclast, old-school charmer, occasional GT. A unique supercar.	4.0	2.8	1783	29.6	-

MAZDA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
2 1.5 Skyactiv-G 90PS SE-L Nav	★★★★☆	22.4.15	The go-to option for keen drivers is also a convincing all-rounder.	10.4	11.0	1050	-	-
3 2.0 Skyactiv-X 181PS GT Sport	★★★★☆	6.11.19	Sweet to drive and great to behold, but the Skyactiv-X engine is no knockout.	9.1	9.1	1425	57.0	-

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*For three weeks from publication date

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
MX-30 145PS GT Sport Tech	★★★⯪☆	10.3.21	Has smart looks and a plush interior, but the first Mazda EV deserved more.	9.1	8.6	1663	-	-
CX-5 2.2D 150PS 2WD Sport Nav	★★★★☆	28.6.17	Still moderately left of field but now likeable in greater proportions.	9.4	9.2	1620	53.9	-
CX-60 e-Skyactiv D 3.3 RWD Exclusive-Line	★★★⯪☆	10.5.23	Old-school in all the best ways, but the ride is difficult to overlook.	7.6	7.2	1893	52.3	-
MX-5 1.5 SE-L Nav	★★★★⯪	2.9.15	An outstanding and usable sports car at an outstanding price.	8.4	7.9	1050	-	-
McLAREN								
720S	★★★★★	24.5.17	Sufficiently complete and exciting to dominate rivals and hugely fast.	2.9	2.0	1419	24.2	-
750S	★★★★☆	19.6.24	McLaren's mainstay is a bit of a wild child – at times, to its own cost.	2.9	2.0	1412	28.8	-
Artura	★★★★⯪	19.10.22	Brilliantly packaged, invitingly poised and wise use of electrification.	3.2	2.1	1552	32.9	17
Artura Spider	★★★★⯪	6.11.24	Artura finds extra form in convertible guise.	3.1	2.2	1618	27.2	17
GT	★★★⯪☆	27.1.21	Plenty of pace and purity, less GT-typical usability and refinement.	3.3	2.3	1580	34.2	
MERCEDES-AMG								
A45 S 4Matic+ Plus	★★★★⯪	4.3.20	AMG brings its hottest hatch yet to life without harming usability.	4.1	3.3	1661	41.5	-
C63 S E Performance 4Matic+ Night Edition Premium Plus Estate	★★★☆☆	31.7.24	Fascinating engineering feat falls flat as an exciting super-estate.	3.3	2.8	2217	27.1	7.1
GT 63 4Matic+ 4-Door Coupé	★★★★⯪	13.3.19	AMG defies physics with a four-door GT that handles beautifully.	3.3	2.7	2135	30.1	-
GT 63 S E Performance 4-Door Coupé	★★★⯪☆	21.6.23	Rocket-ship GT with astonishing powertrain but still lacks driver reward.	2.9	2.5	2339	23.9	6
EQS 53 4Matic+ Night Edition	★★★★☆	8.6.22	Good but doesn't quite live up to its spectacular on-paper potential.	3.6	2.8	2673	-	259
S63 E Performance Night Edition	★★★★☆	2.10.24	Prodigiously quick, confoundingly slick in its handling, but has a coarseness to it.	3.5	2.7	2666	26.1	-
GLE 53 4Matic+ Premium Plus	★★★⯪☆	14.10.20	Remarkable dynamic versatility but lacks some driver appeal.	5.4	4.9	2471	29.4	-
SL 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus	★★★⯪☆	26.7.23	Stonking V8 doesn't quite redeem a car of as many sacrifices as gains.	3.5	2.8	1939	26.2	-
GT 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus Coupé	★★★⯪☆	14.8.24	Fearsomely quick and truly usable but less lovable than before.	3.1	2.7	1972	30.7	-
MERCEDES-BENZ								
A200 Sport	★★★★☆	4.7.18	Luxurious and desirable but not good enough to drive to take top spot.	8.7	7.9	1375	56.7	-
A200 AMG Line Executive	★★★★☆	24.5.23	Significant progress for a keen-handling and efficient premium hatch.	7.8	7.3	1396	59.3	-
A250e AMG Line Premium	★★★☆☆	5.8.20	Falls some way short of a rounded 'premium' driving experience.	6.7	5.4	1665	57.8	-
B180 Sport	★★★★☆	3.4.19	In an ever-shrinking niche, this compact MPV deserves consideration.	8.4	8.3	1405	51.3	-
CLA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★☆☆	21.8.19	Nearer the mark to look at but still way wide of it as a driver's car.	6.8	6.1	1555	48.3	-
C300e AMG Line	★★★★⯪	4.5.22	Long-range hybrid tech gives C-Class an outstanding selling point.	5.8	5.1	2005	49.0	48
E220d AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★★☆	3.1.24	An effective blend of convention, comfort, luxury and modernity.	7.2	5.9	1917	65.8	-
EQE 350+ AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★⯪☆	4.1.23	Hot on comfort and tech but lacklustre on range, material quality and space.	6.0	5.5	2386	-	262
EQS 450 Business Class SUV	★★★⯪☆	6.3.24	Ultra-luxurious seven-seater strays confusingly into MPV territory.	5.5	5.2	2899	-	265
S580e L AMG Line Premium Plus Executive	★★★★⯪	6.4.22	Plug-in S-Class is the best of an otherwise ordinary generation.	5.2	4.2	2530	37.0	45
EQA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★☆☆	17.11.21	Competent but entirely average. For the money, we expect better.	8.4	7.6	2030	-	200
GLB 220d 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★⯪☆	16.9.20	Smart looking and practical but its identity feels stretched at times.	7.4	7.1	1810	55.4	-
EQB 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★⯪☆	18.5.22	A versatile premium EV that doesn't easily command its premium.	7.7	6.8	2235	-	-
GLC 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★⯪☆	13.9.23	Shines in places but doesn't notably elevate the GLC proposition.	6.5	6.0	1929	41.2	-
GLS 400d 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★⯪☆	12.2.20	Has much to commend it but not enough to be the S-Class of SUVs.	6.5	6.0	2634	38.2	-
G350d AMG Line	★★★★☆	17.7.19	Customary capability, charm and ego, now with 21st-century luxury.	7.5	7.2	2451	31.3	-
G500 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★★☆	25.9.24	Anachronistic, iconoclastic and expensive but very hard not to love.	5.1	4.5	–	30.7	-
CLE 300e AMG Line Premium Plus Coupé	★★★★☆	13.11.24	Electrification brings traditional Merc strengths to a desirable mid-sized coupé.	6.1	5.5	2122	37.1	49
MG								
3 1.5 3Form Sport	★★★⯪☆	25.12.13	No slayer of the best mainstream giants but cheap done very cheerfully.	11.4	11.6	1240	41.4	-
3 Hybrid+ Trophy	★★★⯪☆	12.6.24	Good value and with no serious vices but still lacks a final layer of polish.	6.8	6.2	1311	47.9	-
4 EV Long Range SE	★★★★☆	5.4.23	Good value, useful and fun to drive to boot.	7.1	6.1	1692	-	185
5 SW EV Exclusive	★★★⯪☆	25.11.20	MG's second EV does cheap motoring much better than the first.	8.0	7.1	1538	-	161
ZS EV Exclusive	★★★☆☆	4.12.19	Practical, affordable MG fails to truly move the game on.	8.9	8.0	1556	-	113
MINI								
Countryman C Exclusive	★★★⯪☆	17.4.24	Spacious but sends mixed messages on family-friendly refinement.	8.7	7.7	1618	46.9	-
Aceman SE Exclusive	★★★⯪☆	8.1.25	Compact SUV has the usual Mini charm but limited extra grown-up appeal.	6.8	5.7	1756	3.1	162
MORGAN								
Plus Four	★★★⯪☆	12.8.20	Refreshing and fun in that true Morgan way but lacks a little polish.	5.1	4.3	1013	54.0	-
Plus Six	★★★★☆	10.4.24	The individualist's sports car made better.	4.4	3.3	1188	37.2	-
Super 3	★★★★⯪	9.11.22	Adds some subtle modernity to the 3 Wheeler's endless giggles.	6.9	5.9	644	43.5	-
NISSAN								
Juke 1.0 DIG-T 117 Tekna	★★★⯪☆	29.1.20	Impressive in some respects but outstanding in few.	11.9	11.8	1256	46.0	-
Qashqai 1.3 DIG-T 158 Tekna	★★★★☆	28.7.21	Ticks the important family car boxes but its powertrain frustrates.	10.0	9.3	1412	44.9	-
Ariya 87kWh Evolve	★★★⯪☆	26.10.22	Surprisingly traditional and luxurious but not wholly successful.	8.2	6.4	2109	-	-
X-Trail e-Power e-4orce AWD Tekna	★★★★☆	22.2.23	Capable all-rounder that deals effortlessly with everyday life.	6.6	6.0	1947	33.8	-
OMODA								
5 1.6 TGDI Comfort	★★⯪☆☆	20.11.24	Chinese SUV has some promise as a purely rational buy but feels under-developed.	7.4	6.3	1474	38.2	-
PEUGEOT								
e-208 Allure Premium	★★★★☆	6.5.20	Stylish, drivable, usable, reasonably priced – and the best small EV	-	-	1455	38.2	-
308 1.2T Puretech 130 GT	★★★★☆	25.5.22	A reminder of the old Peugeot magic. Small, supple and a bit special.	9.5	9.2	1358	55.3	-
408 Hybrid 180 GT e-EAT8	★★★★☆	11.10.23	Novel Peugeot shows an alternative path for the family car.	8.2	7.3	1746	42.1	40

TOP 3

BEST ELECTRIC CARS

1 Cupra Born

2 Hyundai Ioniq 5 N

3 Volkswagen ID 7

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
508 BlueHDi 180 S&S GT Auto ★★★★☆ 24.10.18 Stylish and likeable but lacking the polish of more premium rivals.	8.8	8.5	1671	52.0	-
508 SW Hybrid 225 S&S Allure e-EAT8 ★★★★☆ 8.7.20 This is a comfortable car that looks smart and feels classy.	-	-	1720	-	-
508 SW Hybrid4 PSE ★★★★☆ 5.5.21 Hits notable handling highs but feels less than sharp elsewhere.	5.7	4.7	1892	44.0	-
e-2008 GT Line ★★★½☆ 30.9.20 Cheaper versions impress; pricier ones won't worry class leaders.	9.5	8.9	1638	-	-
3008 1.6 BlueHDi 120 GT Line ★★★½☆ 18.1.17 In challenging company, the 3008 promises more than it delivers.	12.0	12.1	1300	53.2	-
e-3008 73kWh Allure ★★★½☆ 4.8.24 Electric family SUV is rich, handsome and refined but no technical tour de force.	8.5	7.1	2132	-	219

POLESTAR

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
2 BST Edition 270 ★★★½☆ 12.4.23 A creditable attempt at electric car thrills, although not quite fully formed.	4.5	3.4	2161	-	188

PORSCHE

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
718 Boxster ★★★★½ 8.6.16 Better than ever objectively, but at the expense of vital subjective appeal.	5.4	4.3	1395	35.9	-
718 Cayman S ★★★★½ 10.8.16 Still the greatest sports coupé out there, even if it doesn't sound like it.	4.8	3.9	1430	-	-
718 Cayman GTS ★★★★½ 9.5.18 Outstanding in lots of ways but, so far, less Cayman may still be more.	4.8	3.6	1390	39.0	-
718 Spyder ★★★★½ 1.4.20 Spyder's flat six rectifies most, if not quite all, of the 718's shortcomings.	4.3	3.5	1350	30.1	-
718 Cayman GT4 RS ★★★★★ 14.9.22 A feast of noise, revs, handling poise and thrills. Incredibly special.	3.9	3.0	1444	27.1	-
911 Carrera S ★★★★½ 29.5.19 Faster, richer and more competent than the 991, if less vivacious.	3.4	2.8	1525	39.4	-
911 GT3 PDK ★★★★½ 11.8.21 Less versatile than some past GT3s but still spectacularly good.	3.4	2.7	1430	29.2	-
911 Turbo S ★★★★½ 10.8.22 Has a questionable raison d'être but is engaging and awesomely capable.	2.5	2.0	1640	36.3	-
911 Carrera T ★★★★☆ 30.8.23 Sharper 911 has a likeable simplicity but makes key compromises.	4.9	3.8	1456	39.1	-
911 GT3 RS ★★★★½ 22.11.23 Esoteric even by hardcore 911 standards but simply monumental.	3.2	2.5	1476	26.7	-
911 Dakar ★★★★☆ 10.1.24 Rally-raid-themed throwback charms like no other modern 911.	3.3	2.6	1660	36.0	-
911 S/T ★★★★★ 3.7.24 Porsche's GT division alters its recipe to deliver an all-time great.	3.7	2.6	1408	30.9	-
Macan Turbo ★★★★½ 4.6.14 Luxury SUV meets sports car in a compact, well-priced package.	4.7	4.3	2050	30.9	-
Cayenne S ★★★★½ 21.2.24 Rebooted Cayenne impresses and the charming V8 is our pick.	5.0	4.3	2256	28.8	-
Cayenne Turbo ★★★★☆ 5.9.18 As impressive as ever but not quite the driver's car it once was.	3.9	3.4	2307	31.5	-
Cayenne Turbo S E-Hybrid ★★★½☆ 27.5.20 Technically impressive but fails to make a convincing case for itself.	-	-	2490	-	-
Cayenne Turbo GT Coupé ★★★★☆ 20.7.22 Uncompromising rapid SUV is a bit of a monster – but a likeable one.	3.1	2.7	2251	26.1	-
Panamera 4S Diesel ★★★★★ 1.2.17 A multi-talented sporting GT with an unmatched range of abilities.	4.1	3.8	2050	42.8	-
Taycan Turbo S ★★★★½ 30.10.24 Porsche deftly keeps its superb EV on the boil.	2.6	1.9	2356	2.7	233

TOP 3

BEST ELECTRIC SPORTS CARS

1 Porsche Taycan

2 Audi RS E-tron GT

3 Rimac Nevera

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

RENAULT

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Clio TCe 100 Iconic ★★★★½ 27.11.19 Plusher, smoother, more mature. A car of substance as well as style.	11.6	10.9	1138	56.9	-
Mégane E-Tech Techno ★★★½☆ 23.11.22 Likeable and eye-catching, but rivals have moved the EV game on.	6.9	5.4	1688	-	198
Captur TCe 130 S-Edition EDC ★★★½☆ 18.3.20 Second-generation Captur should prove popular, but not with this powertrain.	9.4	9.2	1363	53.1	-
Arkana E-Tech Hybrid 145 S-Edition ★★★½☆ 13.10.21 Showy styling clothes an eminently sensible but unspectacular car.	11.0	10.1	1365	58.3	-
Scenic E-Tech Iconic Long Range ★★★★☆ 26.6.24 The Scenic finally conforms but does so with style and substance.	8.1	6.3	1916	-	313
Austral E-Tech Iconic Esprit Alpine ★★★½☆ 19.7.23 Clever hybrid and pleasant cabin but let down by clumsy dynamics.	8.5	6.9	1696	43.5	-

ROLLS-ROYCE

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ghost ★★★★½ 13.1.21 Most technologically advanced Rolls-Royce is an exceptional limo.	4.7	3.8	2490	28.5	-
Phantom ★★★★★ 4.4.18 The world's greatest and finest luxury car is now also the very best.	5.5	4.4	2780	28.4	-
Spectre ★★★★½ 20.12.23 Superbly lavish and intoxicatingly refined, if shy of epoch-making.	4.1	3.1	2935	-	245
Cullinan Black Badge ★★★★☆ 19.2.20 Far more likeable to drive than look at, for those who have a use for it.	4.9	4.2	2739	23.6	-

SEAT

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ibiza 1.0 TSI SE Technology ★★★★½ 19.7.17 Grown-up supermini shows its rivals how it's done – in most respects.	10.0	10.0	1047	55.6	-
Leon eHybrid FR ★★★½☆ 2.12.20 Competent and efficient but verges on being forgettable to drive.	7.2	6.2	1558	46.3	26
Arona 1.0 TSI SE Technology ★★★★☆ 15.11.17 Polished, mature all-rounder has since lost its class-best crown.	10.5	10.7	1149	40.9	-
Ateca 1.6 TDI Ecomotive SE ★★★★½ 19.10.16 Former class leader for all the right reasons – desirability included.	10.5	10.3	1408	-	-
Ateca 1.5 Eco TSI FR Black Edition DSG ★★★☆☆ 25.10.23 Once-appealing Nissan Qashqai rival now shows some signs of neglect.	8.9	8.0	1396	44.4	-

SKODA

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Fabia 1.0 TSI 95PS SE Comfort ★★★★½ 9.2.22 Comfy, spacious and good value, this supermini is Skoda at its best.	9.9	9.7	1117	58.7	-
Scala SE 1.5 TSI 150PS DSG ★★★½☆ 31.7.19 Different from the bigger Octavia but perhaps not by enough.	7.9	7.3	1200	52.9	-
Octavia 2.0 TDI 150PS SE L First Edition Estate DSG ★★★★☆ 2.9.20 Leads the charge to take Skoda upmarket and mostly succeeds.	8.4	8.7	1510	73.0	-
Octavia 2.0 TDI vRS ★★★★☆ 17.2.21 Enduring fast diesel is better at a simmer than a rolling boil.	7.2	5.9	1441	69.6	-
Superb SE L 2.0 TDI 150PS Estate ★★★★★ 17.7.24 The large, functional estate car modernised in all the right ways.	8.4	8.2	1673	68.7	-
Karoq 2.0 TDI 150PS Scout ★★★½☆ 30.1.19 Practical, comfortable Skoda is short on charm and dynamic polish.	8.9	9.6	1629	47.1	-
Enyaq iV 80 Lounge ★★★★☆ 18.8.21 Practical, rangy, well priced. Hits a sweet spot in the EV market.	8.3	7.8	2098	-	262

SMART

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
#1 Premium ★★★½☆ 8.11.23 Drivability frustrations mar an otherwise agreeable experience.	5.6	4.6	1861	-	229
#3 Premium ★★★½☆ 15.5.24 Makings of an interesting alternative EV but let down by the finer details.	5.7	4.9	1832	-	205

SUBARU

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Crosstrek 2.0i e-Boxer Touring ★★★½☆ 28.2.24 Improved manners for junior off-roader are welcome, if not transformative.	10.4	10.4	1620	45.3	-
Outback 2.5i Lineartronic Touring ★★★½☆ 27.9.23 A pretty good answer to a question that only a few people asked.	9.3	8.7	1690	42.8	-
Solterra AWD Touring ★★★☆☆ 15.3.23 A hint of Subaru-typical capability doesn't take this EV quite far enough.	6.7	6.2	2051	-	169

SUZUKI

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Vitara 1.6 SZ5 ★★★½☆ 29.4.15 The Vitara is solidly built in Suzuki's image – and that's fine with us.	9.5	9.5	1124	-	-
SX4 S-Cross 1.6 DDiS SZ4 ★★★½☆ 30.10.13 Quietly capable in most respects and remarkable for its parsimony.	10.0	10.1	1305	67.5	-

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Across 2.5 PHEV E-Four CVT	★★★★½	7.4.21	Excellent hybrid powertrain makes it one of the best PHEVs around.	6.4	5.8	1966	44.4	48

TESLA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Model 3 Standard Range Plus	★★★★☆	4.9.19	Wrinkles aside, it offers great electric performance and usability at this price.	5.8	4.7	1633	-	156
Model 3 Long Range	★★★★☆	14.2.24	Packs a real punch. Both updated Model 3s are fine propositions.	4.4	3.4	1846	-	277
Model Y Long Range AWD	★★★★☆	23.3.22	A far better electric car than a premium SUV.	4.7	3.6	1978	-	234
Model S P90D	★★★★½	20.4.16	Great EV, intriguing driver's car. Not quite the perfect luxury GT.	3.5	3.0	2220	-	214
Model S Plaid	★★★½☆	2.8.23	Astonishing pace but not a fully rounded performance saloon.	2.4	1.7	2220	-	301
Model X 90D	★★★★☆	15.2.17	High-rise EV strains under SUV brief but still feels like a history maker.	5.2	4.2	2508	-	147

TOYOTA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Aygo X Limited Edition	★★★½☆	11.5.22	A mostly very grown-up small car but also an expensive one.	15.6	16.5	974	58.7	-
Yaris 1.5 Hybrid Design	★★★★☆	23.9.20	Grows not only in stature but also in ability and subjective appeal.	9.2	8.8	1140	65.0	-
GR Yaris Circuit Pack	★★★★★	3.3.21	Toyota, on a roll with driver's cars, provides yet another winner.	5.2	5.0	1283	39.2	-
Corolla 2.0 Hybrid Design Touring Sports	★★★★☆	5.6.19	A big step up for Toyota in a vital sector and a better hybrid to boot.	8.5	7.7	1537	52.6	-
bZ4X AWD Vision	★★★½☆	18.1.23	A decent effort all round but not exceptional in any way.	6.4	5.9	2023	-	208
Mirai Design Premium	★★★★☆	16.6.21	Impressive hydrogen fuel cell car has made strides but remains hamstrung overall.	8.7	8.3	1937	-	-
GR Supra Pro	★★★★☆	14.8.19	Fast, usable and has plenty going for it but leaves us wanting more.	4.4	3.6	1495	39.0	-
Hilux 2.8 D-4D GR Sport	★★★½☆	1.3.23	Gazoo-branded Ford Ranger Raptor rival is formidable but lacks fun factor.	10.0	9.5	2241	32.5	-

VAUXHALL

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Corsa 1.2 Turbo 100PS Ultimate Nav Auto	★★★½☆	22.1.20	Supermini is improved in many ways but lacks the appeal to match its price.	11.2	11.5	1171	51.8	-
Astra 1.2 Turbo 130PS GS Line	★★★½☆	5.10.22	Family hatchback's gentle push upmarket is only a qualified success.	9.9	9.2	1304	55.3	-
Crossland X 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite	★★★☆☆	7.6.17	Typically practical and well priced, but Vauxhall can do better.	9.8	10.3	1278	54.2	-
Mokka 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite Nav Premium Auto	★★★½☆	12.5.21	The driving experience sells a brave design effort just a little short.	9.3	9.1	1238	48.6	-
Grandland X Hybrid4 Ultimate Nav	★★★☆☆	22.4.20	Inspires big expectations and delivers few, but it's an interesting fleet option.	-	-	1800	-	-
Combo Life 1.5 Turbo D 100PS Energy	★★★½☆	27.12.18	Usable, spacious and practical, if not very pretty to look at.	14.7	16.2	1552	60.1	-

VOLKSWAGEN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Polo 1.0 TSI 95PS SE	★★★★½	31.1.18	Brings 'big car' space, class, kit and finish to this class like never before.	10.7	11.2	1145	57.1	-
Polo 2.0 TSI GTI+	★★★★☆	1.8.18	A usable, quick and vastly competent effort but not the most thrilling.	6.7	5.9	1342	46.8	-
Golf 1.5 eTSI 150PS Style DSG	★★★★½	22.7.20	Additional strengths and familiar ones carry it back to the class lead.	8.3	7.8	1330	60.0	-
Golf 1.5 TSI eHybrid Style	★★★★½	23.10.24	New plug-in Golf takes the PHEV hatchback's status to greater heights.	7.2	6.1	1619	46.5	-
Golf GTI	★★★½☆	25.9.24	'Mk8.5' version of hot hatchback is slick and effective but not a big enough step forward.	5.3	4.4	-	47.2	-
Golf R	★★★★☆	14.4.21	Most entertaining distillation of the Golf R formula yet – for a price.	4.4	3.7	1520	43.9	-
ID 3 Pro Performance Life	★★★★☆	31.3.21	Bland but with the substance to further the zero-emissions push.	7.0	6.5	1757	-	145
Arteon 2.0 BiTDI 240PS 4Motion R-Line	★★★½☆	27.9.17	Considered approach produces an executive flagship short on sparkle.	6.5	6.2	1866	55.6	-
Arteon eHybrid Elegance Shooting Brake	★★★½☆	9.6.21	Striking PHEV appears radical but upholds Volkswagen's traditions at heart.	7.1	6.0	1783	52.5	-
ID 7 Pro Match	★★★★½	13.3.24	Volkswagen finds some electric form in an unexpected format.	6.1	5.1	2162	-	239
T-Roc 2.0 TSI 190PS 4Motion SEL DSG	★★★★½	24.1.18	Shows performance verve, dynamic completeness and stylish swagger.	6.7	6.5	1534	37.5	-
T-Roc 1.5 TSI Evo R-Line Cabriolet DSG	★★½☆☆	10.6.20	It brings little worth having to the compact cabriolet niche.	-	-	1540	-	-
Tiguan 1.5 eTSI 150PS R-Line	★★★½☆	22.5.24	Functional and mature, but this isn't the engine or trim we would go for.	9.4	9.2	1606	44.9	-
ID 4 GTX Max	★★★½☆	27.10.21	GTX adds flavour to ID 4 but doesn't reimagine 'GTI' for the EV age.	6.2	5.6	2220	-	200
Touareg 3.0 TDI 4Motion R-Line Tech	★★★½☆	8.8.18	An inoffensive if forgettable bid at a luxury market breakthrough.	7.2	6.6	2292	41.6	-
Touareg 3.0 TSI eHybrid 4Motion Elegance	★★★½☆	5.6.24	It's versatile and likeably unpretentious but won't be a default company car choice.	6.2	5.7	2446	34.1	26
Touran 2.0 TDI 150PS SE Family DSG	★★★★☆	3.2.16	A spacious, refined and classy all-rounder – albeit a slightly bland one.	9.9	9.7	1666	-	-
Multivan 1.4 eHybrid Style	★★★★☆	8.3.23	Latest Volkswagen 'bus combines the best bits of both car and van.	8.4	7.1	2243	37.9	14
ID Buzz 77kWh Style Pro	★★★★☆	8.2.23	It costs plenty but offers versatility and luxury accomplishments.	9.5	9.1	2498	-	185
Grand California 600	★★★½☆	2.1.20	Grandest California is classy but not half as clever as its smaller namesake.	15.8	16.7	3095	28.5	-
Transporter Sportline Black Edition Kombi SWB	★★★☆☆	30.3.22	Not compromised but hardly enhanced by its sporting agenda.	9.1	9.0	2108	39.1	-
Passat eHybrid 204PS Elegance	★★★★☆	13.11.24	Rounded and with good PHEV credentials, but less compelling than its sister car.	7.2	6.4	1836	44.5	73

VOLVO

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
EX30 Single Motor Extended Range Plus	★★★☆☆	1.5.24	Not enough key strengths – and not enough Volvo pragmatism.	5.7	5.1	1779	-	179
C40 Recharge Twin Ultimate	★★★½☆	13.4.22	A transitional model for Volvo that doesn't go quite far enough.	4.4	3.6	2172	-	194
XC40 D4 AWD First Edition	★★★★½	7.2.18	Wieldy, classy and simple. As good as its bigger brothers, if not better.	8.5	8.5	1735	43.8	-
XC60 D4 AWD R-Design	★★★½☆	5.7.17	The right product at the right time but lacking the right dynamic finish.	8.9	8.9	1836	48.9	-
XC90 D5 AWD Momentum	★★★★☆	17.6.15	A very impressive all-rounder with its own distinctive appeal.	8.3	8.3	2076	-	-
V60 D4 Momentum Pro Auto	★★★★☆	27.6.18	Fine-looking, capable and practical estate with only a few demerits.	8.9	8.3	1669	43.1	-
V60 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design	★★★★½	21.9.22	Strong hybrid system gives ageing Volvo a lot of fresh appeal.	4.9	4.3	2036	38.0	51
V90 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design	★★★★½	11.11.20	Hardly revolutionary but exceptionally appealing nonetheless.	5.6	4.9	2109	41.9	-

WHAT'S COMING WHEN

Ferrari 12Cilindri May
Flagship GT has 819bhp V12, two-seat interior, sci-fi look.

Skoda Elroq Spring
All-new 360-mile EV aimed at compact SUV crowd.

Mercedes-Benz CLA Summer
Junior saloon offers new petrol 1.5 with diesel-like efficiency.

SCAN THE CODE FOR THE FULL LIST

Why I love...
CLOTH INTERIORS

BY ILLYA VERPRAET

Cost-cutting isn't sexy. Journalists don't tend to receive press releases proclaiming 'we've made the new version of our car intentionally worse so we can save some money while also charging more for it'. But sustainability sells. At least car makers think so. Don't say: 'We've replaced leather with vinyl, because it can be made more cheaply.' Do say: 'The new such-and-such features vegan Sensitastic© upholstery made from recycled bottles, because won't somebody think of the cows?' Never mind that leather is often a by-product from meat production rather than a goal in itself.

I actually thought the move away from leather seats would be a good thing and spark designers' creativity, because to be honest I find leather overrated: cold in winter, warm in summer and not very grippy, it's surely inferior to cloth. Instead we got a vinyl revival.

But there are some glimmers of hope: a couple of intrepid material design teams willing to try something different. One of the most prominent proponents is Volvo, which has been offering a wool-blend option on some of its cars for a number of years now and doesn't charge more for it than for leather.

Leather upholstery is no longer the automatic choice for a plush cabin

It was fitted in an XC40 I borrowed a while back, and I thought it was wonderful. Volvo's seats tend to be among the most comfortable anyway, and in combination with a natural fabric that breathes and holds you in, it's a soothing place to be. In this case, it's also not dyed black, which is such a nice break from the dingy interiors of most new cars. You wouldn't paint the walls of your lounge black (unless you're a goth), so why have a black car interior? The marled white and grey of the wool is so much more interesting than the flat surface of leather.

Verpraet's first car set the tone for his interior design tastes

> **"Only a goth would paint the walls of their lounge black"**

Some of the Volkswagen Group brands seem to have the right idea as well, being in the midst of a minor velour revival. You get a dark grey soft fabric as standard in Skoda's Superb and Kodiaq, with leather featuring on the more expensive trim levels, and Cupra's Born offers something similar, even if you have to go for the top V3 trim.

I wonder if the cloth-versus-leather question is a cyclical, generational thing. After all, on the earliest cars, the servant driver sat outside on weatherproof leather while the owner luxuriated inside the cab on a fabric bench. But at some point leather became a luxury thing; my parents wouldn't entertain a car without it. Meanwhile, most cars I've been in have had leather seats, but I have very fond memories of my first car, a base-spec E30-generation BMW 316i Touring with velour.

So, well done to Volvo, Skoda and Cupra. Whether it's because of trends or a push for sustainability, I hope this is the start of an era of more interesting interior fabrics.

What we did this week

Viva Las Vegas

I attended Sony's press conference at CES to hear the latest on the Afeela 1 EV. But that meant first sitting through 45 minutes on everything from making NFL games look like Toy Story to the new series of The Last of Us. I also have no idea what Demon Slayer is or how you watch it on a Crunchy Roll, but the person next to me was so excited he elbowed me in the face while cheering. **JAMES ATTWOOD**

Club class

To the moodily beautiful Normandy coast with French relatives. My 2014 Audi A3 Saloon 1.4 TFSI purred away happily, delivering 46mpg and a 450-mile range despite being loaded up with four people and a ton of presents and other clobber. All went without a hitch, and the Chunnel was perfect as well – especially my belated discovery that you can use Tesco tokens towards the (quite) reasonable carriage fee. **TOM EVANS**

Special delivery

The 2025 Car of the Year trophy had yours truly as a chauffeur to take it to the COTY's Brussels motor show stand ahead of its presentation. Fittingly, the precious cargo (albeit not the most talkative passenger) was transported by the 2024 winner, the Renault Scenic. Never have I been more grateful to be waved through customs at the Channel Tunnel without a stop. **MARK TISSHAW**

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